

IN TRANSIT: TRAVEL AND MOBILITY IN LATINA ART AND LITERATURE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The myth of American travel and mobility has long shaped ideas of nation and national identity. In postwar cultural production, to move *freely* is to enact rights governed by U.S. citizenship. Mobility is thus an embodied social, cultural, and political exercise that informs the production of an ideal national subject. Yet, access to and participation in mobile practices is deeply fraught around issues of difference. This project therefore considers Latina engagement with the promise of travel and mobility, drawing attention to the limits of citizenship and complicating the homogenizing tendencies of Latino identity formation. While other scholars primarily focus on Latino mobility through the lens of subjugation and migrant labor, my analysis attends to generational cultural shifts and changing socio-economic conditions. Throughout the study, I focus on the work of Latina artists like Helena Maria Viramontes, Cristina Henríquez, Michele Serros, and Erika Lopez to show how Latinas adopt various modes of travel and mobility that refute fixity in order to forge cross-cultural affiliations on local and global scales. My work sees Latina movement not simply as reenacting U.S. mobility, but also as a complex raced and gendered action anchored in particular political and cultural realities.

Reading Latinas' engagement with postwar mobility-cum-citizenship, *In Transit* considers how rearticulations of space and time serve to challenge exclusionary practices from within and beyond Latino communities. By considering Latina mobility at various geographic, temporal, and cultural scales, this project complicates Latino literary and cultural theory which tends to separate texts as either resistant or assimilationist. Instead, I see *Latinidad* as less tied geographically to the U.S. and more about the interplay of gender, class, race, sexuality, space, and time. I provide readings of cultural texts that represent Latinas on "unexpected" paths, thus responding to and reimagining travel down routes heretofore untaken.

To the memory of Diego Guzman, Jesus Ramos, and Roberto Ruiz

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Introduction

Dissonance: On Alternative Latina/o Cultural Formations

There are a few things you should know about San Antonio-native Molly Vasquez, the protagonist of the film *Pretty Vacant* (1996). Her “priorities” are her (1) band Aztlán-a-Go-Go, (2) zine *Ex-Voto*, and (3) impending place in rock ‘n’ roll history. Written and directed by Jim Mendiola, *Pretty Vacant* follows the fictional character’s pursuit of these interests while she evades her family’s annual trip to Mexico. Molly believes she is on the verge of a major musical discovery and is frustrated at her father’s unyielding request that she join them on this “pilgrimage to the motherland” (Mendiola, *Pretty Vacant*). While proclaiming a deep admiration for the people and their history, Molly does not find Mexico appealing. Her social life is in the here and now of the 1990s San Antonio music scene and not in what she assumes will be a boring family expedition. The sense of immediacy anchoring her in San Antonio is further solidified by the discovery she makes during research for issue five of *Ex-Voto*. Having experimented with film for issue four, Molly wants to dedicate the issue to her cut-and-paste roots and focus the issue on music. In particular it would be a special edition dedicated to U.K. punk band the Sex Pistols’ infamous 1978 show in San Antonio. While doing work for this project Molly finds a musical artifact with the potential to change punk history.

Molly arrives at Randy’s, the nightclub that hosted the Sex Pistols, and is allowed to look around. Although the Sex Pistols performed there over a decade ago, divine intervention makes it so Molly finds what appears to be a set-list for their show. The camera pans down as if to reflect Molly’s eyes scanning the sheet of paper. Hastily written Sex Pistols’ songs are numbered and listed in pen. Yet, scribbled in pencil below number twelve’s “Anarchy in the U.K” are the words “El Kranke.” This song is heavily associated with legendary *conjunto*-accordionist

Esteban “Steve” Jordan. Thus, if in fact the paper Molly retrieves from Randy’s is the Sex Pistols’ playlist then she’s uncovered the Sex Pistols gone Chicano—what Michelle Habel-Pallán refers to as the Sex Pistols’ “Tejanoization” (167). Molly likens this musical encounter to another seminal U.K. punk band, the Clash, and their reggae-inspired sound that was “a direct reflection of their exposure to the Caribbean diaspora and its musical expression there in London” (Mendiola, *Pretty Vacant*). Similarly, Molly’s theory is that the Sex Pistols encountered Esteban Jordan’s “El Kranke” on the radio as they made their way through Austin and toward San Antonio. Listening to the “Jimi Hendrix of the Accordion” (as Jordan is called) inspired the Sex Pistols to consider covering the song at Randy’s. Molly goes to great lengths to assert this theory by creating a map of musical migration that stretches out across the Atlantic. She also arranges meetings with Jordan’s manager and the lead singer of the Sex Pistols’ opening act to gather more information.

During the meeting with the manager that her desire for truth about the musical overlaps goes unfulfilled. The manager says that Jordan recorded “El Kranke” in 1980; almost two years after the Sex Pistols had broken up. While this information makes the musical intervention moot, Molly is undeterred. Instead, she begins working on a script, “like if the ‘El Kranke’ thing did turn out to be true, and some girl found it, and tried to rewrite punk history from a Chicana feminist standpoint with the newfound evidence” (Mendiola, *Pretty Vacant*). Molly’s persistence to move forward with the story through a different medium ensures its (fictional) existence and circulation. Furthermore, in this moment of meta-narration Molly enacts what Chela Sandoval refers to as differential consciousness. That is, “a strategy of oppositional ideology that functions on an all together different register [It] is the expression of the new subject position called for by Althusser—it permits functioning within, yet beyond, the demands of the dominant

ideology” (43). Molly uses the script’s storytelling to reinstate the connection between the Sex Pistols and Jordan, and moreover to inscribe herself as the one who makes the connection. By envisioning herself as the interlocutor among these seemingly discordant cultural figures, Molly unhinges their spatial and temporal location in the past to explore unexpected affiliations for recognizing alternative physical, social, and cultural mobilities.

I begin with Molly Vasquez to foreground the theoretical and aesthetic issues at stake in this dissertation. Molly, as object of analysis, provides an entry from which to speak about the limits and potentials of *Latinidad*. And in doing so, I take up the work of Cristina Beltran who reads “‘Latino Politics’ not as an object or practice to be identified and permanently defined but, rather, as an ongoing argument whose effectiveness and legitimacy can be understood only over time. Approached as a site of permanent political contestation, *Latinidad*’s indeterminacy is not its failure but its promise” (74). Likewise, Molly’s dual participation in the punk and *conjunto* music scene is but one example of differentiation from where alternative expressions of *Latinidad* emerge. This is not to read the “alternative” as resolution but rather as a productive tension in the ongoing construction of *Latinidad*. Thus, the dissertation examines “Latino”—particularly “Latina”—as a discursively constructed site of constant resignification.

Out of Place/Out of Time

On January 8, 1978 when the Sex Pistols took to the stage at Randy’s, Molly was 8 years old. She was too young to have realized the impact they would have on her cultural development. By the time she is a young adult immersed in the punk sound and comes across what she believes to be the Sex Pistols set-list, the band had been long broken-up and even lost a prominent

member.¹ Thus it is only in its last manifestation that Molly's script of the Jordan/"El Kranke"/Pistols collaboration provides them all with the opportunity to coexist. Time and its reconceptualization play a major factor in the ability to impede or allow for the Sex Pistols, Molly, and Jordan to engage one another. However, just as important to these scenes is their location: a U.K. punk band in what was largely known to be a western country music dancehall, a Chicana in San Antonio who is obsessed with a band from across the Atlantic, and the locality of Jordan's sound transposed into a tour bus and onto a set-list. Space and time are inextricably linked to the way we read subjects and respond to one another. From the outside in, it would appear that Molly's triad is consistently out of place and out of time. They do not "fit," or rather do so tenuously according to traditional conceptions of time (as linear) and space (as static). But Molly's construction of an alternate time-space, one that moves both backward and forward to recover and repurpose people, moments, and locations makes this third-space possible. In this third-space, hybridity and ambivalence unhinge signifiers to provide a range of possibilities.

As Achille Mbembe, Caren Kaplan, and Mary Pat Brady have observed, certain spaces are pre-assigned a fixed and unchanging time-space. Considered resistant to change, these locations and their people are also considered to be out of time with and out of place from the modern world. Writing on Frida Kahlo's 1932 "Self-Portrait at the Border Line Between Mexico and the United States," Brady notes the way the particular painting "illustrates the effects of modernity's structural separation of space and time into a dialect that encourages a linear narrative of national development: nations emerge along a linear spatial-temporal continuum that begins with feudalism and ends with cosmopolitanism" (51). While Molly walks a fine line in

¹ As discussed in Chapter 4, the Sex Pistols broke up in San Francisco shortly after the San Antonio show. In February 1979, bassist Sid Vicious died of an overdose.

this behavior when she rejects the trip to Mexico, I would also argue (as I do in Cs 1 and 2) that such dialectical models of premodern/modern are not limited to national borders, but extend intra-nationally and unfold at local levels. Thus, we can look back at Molly and ask, as Chapter 4 does, how can a Chicana from San Antonio in early 1990s like or identify with a U.K. band from the late 1970s/early 1980s?

Throughout the dissertation I consider the way bodies respond and resist when rendered out of place and time. I especially turn to the work on affect by Sarah Ahmed, who writes:

Psychoanalysis allows us to see that emotionality involves movements or associations whereby ‘feelings’ take us across different levels of signification, not all of which can be admitted in the present. This is what I would call the rippling effect of emotion; they move sideways (through ‘sticky’ associations between signs, figures, and objects) as well as backwards (repression always leaves a sticky trace in the past—hence ‘what sticks’ is also bound up with the ‘present absence’ of historicity). (“Affective Economies” 120)

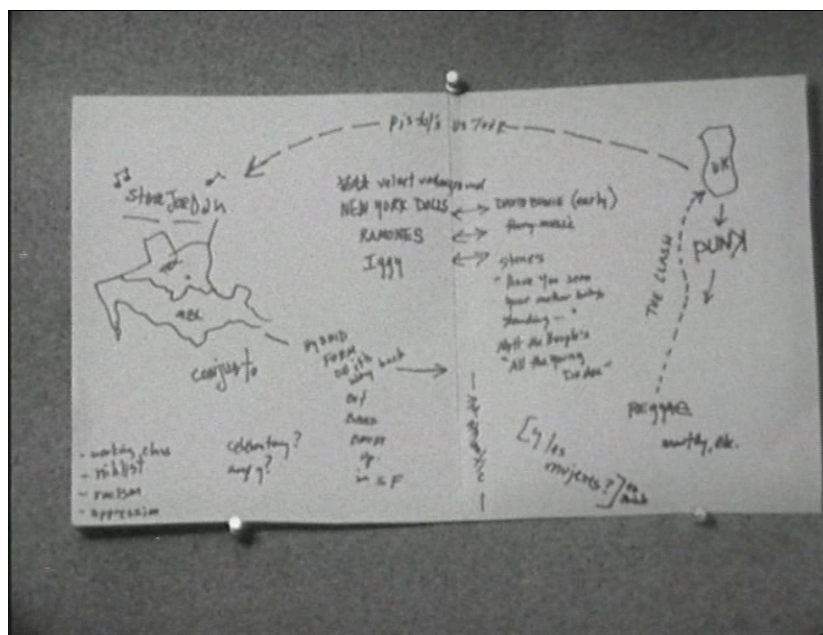
What I find particularly appealing about affective “stickiness” is its ability to travel in various spatiotemporal dimensions. In the “rippling effect of emotions” lie cross-generational traces (as seen in Chapter 4’s lineage of *Locas*), communal links (that keep memory alive as in Chapter 2), and feelings of perpetual foreignness that are produced when traveling subjects have contact with others (Chapters 1 and 3). And while Ahmed focuses on stickiness in relation to fear, I consider its potential use-value for Molly. A figure that can create remote musical connections—what Karen Tongson refers to as ‘remote intimacies’—with a band may seem to be out of her reach. The stickiness helps her seek out and find community with her all-Chicana punk band *Aztlán-a-Go-Go*.

Molly's adoration for the Sex Pistols may seem strange. And as I describe at length in Chapter 4, Latina/os' participation in the British music scene extends this *feeling* of kinship. Recent headlines proclaim, "'Latinos are rockers too,' says Deftones lead singer" (DeValle), and "An Outsider at Home: Why Morrissey's Big with Mexicans" (Schaefer). I consider these headlines along with Habell-Pallán's assertion that Molly invents "her alternative around British punk in response to her limited options, which are circumscribed by the Chicano patriarchy and U.S. racism. Her attraction to punk is not about Great Britain but instead about her desire for an Other—she exoticizes Britain from a Tejana point of view" (168). In these instances Molly and the Latina/os are rendered cultural anomalies. They are figures in places participating in cultures that they don't quite belong in and so do it out of defiance. Thus, leading me to ask (as Morrissey's former band the Smiths did) is it *really* so strange?² Productive for the discussion of cultural foreignness that I address to varying degrees throughout this project is Jasbir Puar's reading of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's assemblage theory. "As opposed to an intersectional model of identity, which presumes that components—race, class, gender sexuality, nation, age, religion—are separable analytics and can thus be disassembled, an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency" (Puar 212).³ I am drawn to the spatial, temporal, and mobile aspects that assemblages provide in order to host "messy networks" and "collections of multiplicities" (Puar 211). I read this messiness into Molly's cultural affiliations—a collage of influence that is at play with the world around her. This awareness of cultures' mobile and fluid aspects also influences Molly's maps of musical and cultural migrations.

² This is also the title of William E. Jones' documentary about Latinos and Morrissey.

³ This theoretical move is not to do away with intersectionality but to explore the productive tension that intersectionality and assemblages may provide.

Cultural Cartographies



[Figure 1. Molly's map of musical migrations. Still from *Pretty Vacant* (Mendiola 1996)]

Molly's map of musical migrations addresses the circulation of culture and transnational musical influence, and it repurposes mapmaking. As a way of asserting her theory of the Sex Pistols interest in *conjunto* sound and its (would be) musical revolution, Molly creates a map that charts the movement of this new sound. Steve Jordan, Texas, Mexico and *conjunto* are to the left of the page, while the U.K., punk, the Clash, and reggae are to the right of it. "Pistols on tour" is written across the top of the page to link Texas and the U.K. And paralleled below is the new musical form "on its way back." Listed in the middle of the page are a range of New York-based bands across from their English counterparts (i.e. New York Dolls <-> David Bowie). Finally, a series of observations including "[y las mujeres?]" ([and the women?]) is scribbled below. This

dissertation responds to Molly's question by considering the mobility of Latinas' cultural expression.

Similar to the cognitive map making in Chapter 2, Molly creates a document, an "official" looking chart of the sonic movement that could have taken place between U.K. punk and Texas *conjunto* music. "Pistols on tour" and "on its way back" elicit this circulation. Molly's presentation of this movement as a circular pattern registers as an ongoing and repetitive cycle that through reiteration has the potential to continuously transform. Although she remarks that the Clash's reggae sound was "just your typical white man appropriation of the exotic other," as the map suggests, it was not a unilateral move (Mendiola *Pretty Vacant*). Rather, this exchange mirrors Lisa Lowe's poignant remarks on hybridization:

Hybridization is not the "free" oscillation between or among chosen identities. It is the uneven process through which imagined communities encounter the violences of the U.S. state, and the capital imperatives served by the United States and by Asian states from which they come, and the process through which they survive these violences by living, inventing, and reproducing different cultural alternatives. (82)

When Molly articulates her thoughts on the "white man's appropriation," she recognizes the uneven power relation at play even as culture moves freely. Furthermore, in Molly's enjoyment and consumption of culture, she too is negotiating her musical complicity. Molly's map is a characterization of this hybrid, assembled identity while concomitantly asserting music's ability to cross borders, create connections, and change tone depending on who we hear singing.⁴

⁴ An allusion to Walt Whitman's "I Hear America Singing" (1867)



[Figure 2. Molly's map of cultural figures. Still from *Pretty Vacant* (Mendiola 1996)]

Reminiscent of Molly's music map and zine productions are the collages that fill her bedroom. On the walls and in the form of *retablos* she builds a wide and far-ranging array of cultural heroes and art that influence her worldview. Of interest to this analysis is her reproduction of Mexican-Tejano folk art through the form of the *retablo*. The small devotional productions are as purposeful as the Sex Pistols/Esteban Jordan map in constructing 'maps of meaning' that I read onto the subject/Molly. The cut-and-paste images come from a variety of sources and locations. At first glance the figure of Frida Kahlo beside Bob Dylan that hovers over the album art for Sonic Youth's "Goo" may seem jarring. Extending the insights of Jennifer González, "these personal objects can be seen to form a syntagmatic array of physical signs in a spatial representation of identity—what I call an autotopography" (133). We can think of the way Molly's *retablo* takes *shape* through assembled images of influence that together take up *space* in her private sphere as autotopography. Its spatial, temporal, and intimate form of storytelling narrates Molly's spiritual relationship with culture. "In the creation of an

autotopography . . . the material world is called upon to present a physical map of memory, history, and belief” (González 134).⁵

In Transit

Spanish bombs, yo te quiero infinito
*Yo te quiero, o mi corazón*⁶

- Tijuana No! “Spanish Bombs”

(Recorded in 1979 by the Clash and re-recorded in 1994 by Mexican punk band Tijuana No!)

In the spirit of Molly Vasquez and her cartographies of *conjunto*-punk sound I engage the various expressive forms that contour the argumentative terrain of *In Transit: Travel and Mobility in Latina Art and Literature*. I provide readings of cultural texts that represent Latinas on “unexpected” routes, responding to and reimagining traditional models of belonging to forge cross-cultural affiliations at local and transnational levels. To this end, I explore two meaning of mobility: physical movement through space and time, and cultural mobility in the distribution, circulation, and access to material culture and the arts. Into the twenty-first century, Latina/o movement is discussed in terms of subjugation and necessity within a U.S. socio-political context. Movement is largely tied to labor migration for Latina/os and is therefore subject to discipline and regulation in the name of capitalist advancement such as the bracero program beginning in the 1940s. In contrast, post-World War II notions of American mobility are seen as synonymous with freedom and the transgression of borders. The American wanderer travels and consumes culture freely; *he* crosses state and national borders as a global citizen. This movement

⁵ In a similar vein, the name of Molly’s zine *Ex-Voto* has religious connotations. The zine comes to represent a type of votive offering to its themes and featured artists, thus recalling Shizu Saldamando’s “The Holy *Cuatro*,” which is discussed at length in Chapter 4

⁶ “Spanish bombs, I infinitely love you. I love you, oh my love”

is free from the surveillance and policing that has come to define Latino/a movement in the U.S. Thus, the successful practice of mobility is a raced, classed, and gendered performance of American nationalism and cultural citizenship afforded to few. In line with the theoretical practices discussed above, this dissertation expands on this to acknowledge generational cultural shifts and changing socio-economic conditions that produce Latina mobility inline with conceptions of freedom and independence, in the process, challenging U.S. exceptionalism and placing pressure on homogenous claims to *Latinidad*.

Like Molly and her production of, and association with, a cultural bricolage that crosses time and transatlantic borders, this dissertation analyzes the types of comparative and international encounters that create opportunities for new forms of social and political expression. The Latinas I analyze have always been and continue to be *in transit*. They are part of a network of local, national, and transnational affiliations that are constantly at play and work in their daily lives. Throughout the dissertation when I discuss particular ethnic groups, I refer to them by national origin but otherwise use the term Latina as the identifying category. Arlene Dávila uses “‘Latinos’ to signify the ubiquitous use of the term by the media and the mainstream press, which neither signals nor marks differences in gender, race, ethnicity, and other variables when making nationwide generalizations” (7). Similarly, I use “Latina” to respond to homogenous claims of *Latinidad*. But, I am interested in national *and* inter-cultural generalizations that are tied to gender and sexuality—traditional and static ways of being that my subjects of analysis trouble. Furthermore, my use of travel and mobility seeks not to idealize movement but rather to address the way movement is embodied and disordered and how even slight, subtle moves (like a song written on a piece of paper) can leave long-term historical imprints.

Structurally, what follows is an assemblage of four chapters. The first and last chapters address issues of transnationalism, while the second and third look at the translocal. Chapter 1, “Pilgrimage: Returning Home,” examines Lorna Dee Cervantes’ poem “Oaxaca, 1974” from the 1981 collection *Emplumada*; Cristina Henríquez’s *The World in Half* (2009); and Michelle Serros’ short story “Let’s Go Mexico!” in *How to Be a Chicana Role Model* (2000). The protagonists of these texts return “home” to their country of origin. They hope that once there, they will find cultural roots (or in the case of Serros, college credit) and affiliation based on language, phenotype, and relation to the land. For example, when Serros goes to Mexico she writes of the possibility that her brown skin may save her from being seen as a tourist. Instead, each figure is disavowed, their bodies “betraying” them. They cannot learn the embodied language of the local population. And when Henríquez’s Miraflores Reid comes close to it she is instructed not to speak or she will run the risk of outing herself as non-Panamanian. Thus, these women cannot move like indigenous (Cervantes), Panamanian (Henríquez), or Mexican (Serros) locals because of the U.S. American way they look and feel. To this end, I examine how inaccessibility to “foreign” culture might provide an opportunity for other affective and political attachments beyond belonging to the nation-state.

Chapter 2, “Displacement: Haunting, Memory, and Resistance in Latino/a Los Angeles,” turns its attention to memory that travels and circulates among community members who live on the verge of erasure by the state. I begin my analysis with Helena Maria Viramontes’ *Their Dogs Came with Them* (2007). This novel tells the story of residents on First Street in East Los Angeles in the midst of an urban renewal project that is destroying their community. I focus my attention on two figures that are usually considered minor characters—Chavela and Renata. Early on, both characters go missing, Chavela through relocation, because of the urban renewal

project, and Renata by way of abduction. Yet, I contend that they are the thread that figuratively and literally haunts the novel throughout. I turn to them as a way to consider their haunting as public memory that runs against the official state's ongoing threat of erasure. From Viramontes, I move to Marisela Norte's poetry and prose from *Peeping Tom Tom Girl* (2008). Where Viramontes sets up the history of East Los Angeles, Norte writes its present. As her poem "Angel" suggests, Los Angeles is a lunatic city always on the brink of collapse. Its residents survive against threats of violence directed from each other and the state. And because of the constant need to labor, they generally cannot see the ties that bind them to Los Angeles and each other. In Norte's work memory travels. It is felt on long bus rides across the city and as people glance at each other from across the street. In this moment of recognition, where people see one another and their stories, is the potential in counter narratives as a form of survival. Finally, I examine the work of Sandra de la Loza's "Pocho Research Society for Invisible History" to discuss the reclaiming of space through the use of plaques—a literal inscription of memory onto the geographical landscape of Los Angeles. Sandra de la Loza takes heed in Helena María Viramontes' plea to remember, and thus she returns to commemorate displaced communities through the installation of plaques at sites where urban renewal and displacement took place. Like Norte, de la Loza feels the history of Latina/o Los Angeles that runs through the city and feels the urgency in documenting it for others to see. In this chapter I turn to the work of Viramontes, Norte, and de la Loza in Los Angeles as examples illustrating the possibilities and limits of remembering and reinscription for a community thought of as immobile and dispensable, addressing the projects' larger issues of mobility set against ideas of immobility.

In Chapter 3, "Roadkill: Achy Obejas' and Erika Lopez's False Starts, Stalls, and Breakdowns," I go back on the road to discuss Obejas' short story "Wrecks" from *We Came All*

the Way from Cuba So You Could Dress Like This? (1994) and Lopez's *Flaming Iguanas: An Illustrated All-Girl Road Novel Thing* (1997). I discuss how the lead protagonists in each text take to the road in the tradition of American travel narratives only to find that (as the women in Chapter 1 find) fitting in does not come easily. Thus where the Los Angeles community fights to maintain their history, Obejas and Lopez wish to strip themselves of their historical baggage to consider a future of free-floating mobile practices. In this chapter I am especially interested in their impulse to crash, as this registers as symbolic break with the past. The break or crash runs the risk of literal death. As both protagonists make their way on the road they are, like Molly, read out of place. And in that moment these women trouble the image of the American citizen as represented by an abstract traveler as well as ideas of femininity tied to *Latinidad*. In going on the road and claiming space, Obejas and Lopez access the possibility for other ways of being and belonging to the nation.

Finally, in Chapter 4, "Diversion: The *Brown* Atlantic," I extend the theoretical work of Paul Gilroy, James Clifford, and Mary Louise Pratt to assess the formation of alternative Latina youth cultures that are grounded in the U.S. but that look toward the Atlantic for inspiration. I examine therefore the work of Chicana punk Alice Bag and Japanese-Mexican-American artist Shizu Saldamando as part of a long lineage of *Locas*, understood here as a group of Chicana-Latinas who are not interested in conforming to traditional forms of being and belonging. Instead, through make-up, hair, style and lots of attitude their resistant stances trouble conventional notions of *Latinidad*. In the pleasure of the unfamiliar these women engage with British popular culture, not in a unilateral movement from the U.K. to the U.S. but as a mutual and ongoing engagement that fashions alternative forms of artistic and cultural expression.

Overall, this dissertation seeks to assemble an archive of twentieth and twenty-first century Latina cultural production that critically assesses how Chicana, Puerto Rican, Cuban American, and Panamanian artists and writers stage movement and mobility. In turn these itinerant transgressions, as they're understood here, index uneven processes of identification on national, local, and transnational scales. Thus, I show how this archive operates as a cultural assemblage not fully grasped within traditional models of migration and Latina/o identity formation, revealing instead a fluid and permeable signifying subject with no endpoints but multiple beginnings. As a whole, the analysis offered here is not a disavowal of roots or Latina identity but rather a call to follow, build, and travel on unpredicted routes.

Chapter 1

Pilgrimage: Returning Home

*Qué lejos estoy del suelo donde he nacido,
inmensa nostalgia invade mi pensamiento...*¹
José López Alavés, “Canción Mixteca”

In 1991, Linda Ronstadt released the concert film *Canciones De Mi Padre: A Romantic Evening in Old Mexico* following the success of her first Spanish-language album of the same name. Elaborate set designs and various costume changes accompany Ronstadt’s rendition of traditional Mexican music. Throughout the evening, the spectator watches Ronstadt transform from *charra*, to *china poblana*, to *Adelita*, thereby evoking feminine figures and symbols of Mexico’s past. Ronstadt’s narration of Mexican nationalist history and personal anecdotes informs the viewer that her outfit and scenery will change while English translations of the lyrics are interspersed throughout the concert footage. Ronstadt’s return to the “songs of her father” constructs an idealized Mexico that is palatable to her largely Anglo English-speaking viewing public. The return is, thereby, not to a Mexican *patria* but rather a Spanish fantasy past, a consumer-friendly *Old Mexico*. As Marci McMahon writes, “Spanish Heritage discourse configured Mexicans and Mexican Americans as premodern, while positioning the culture and identity of people of Mexican descent outside of the borders of the U.S. nation, thereby reinforcing the domestic/foreign binaries prevalent in political rhetoric and policy” (14). Ronstadt’s crossover to Spanish, while rewarding, reinscribes tropes that, as Michelle Habel-Pallán writes, “shaped mainstream images of Mexican Americans, Mexicans, and Hispanics... [and is linked], in complex ways, to a discourse of nation building...” (16). With Ronstadt as guide, the audience is invited to play cultural tourist.

¹ How far I am from the land that birthed me, immense nostalgia takes over my thoughts

Returning to the stage for the encore, Linda Ronstadt is greeted by a long emotive *grito* as the mariachi opens “Canción Mixteca.” José López Alavez composed the song during the Mexican Revolution in the early twentieth century to express the desire to return to his native state of Oaxaca after relocating to Mexico City. The opening lines to “Canción Mixteca” describe his state of mind:

Que lejos estoy del suelo donde he nacido

Immense nostalgia invade mi pensamiento

Y al verme tan solo y triste

Cual hoja el viento

Quisiera llorar,

Quisiera morir

De sentimiento

(Alavez)²

The speaker in “Canción Mixteca” is struck by a wave of immense nostalgia caused in the distance between him and the land that birthed him. The profound loneliness, sadness, and listlessness incurred in the loss of home throws him into deep despair. Aimless, “like a leaf in the wind,” the figure is unable to viscerally express his pain. Thus, he longs to cry or perish. In its first incarnation, “Canción Mixteca” was an “anthem of the entire Mixteca region of Puebla, Oaxaca and Guerrero. An expression of Alavez’s urban nostalgia, it became an expression of regional, local, and ethnic pride” (Velázquez and Vaughn 114). More contemporarily, the song has taken the form of migrant anthem. In this recontextualization, the melancholic desire to

² “How far I am from my land of birth/ immense nostalgia invades my thoughts, and to see me so alone and sad/ like a single leaf in the wind/ I wish I would cry/ I wish I could die/ from feeling too much”

return is compounded by the realization that many cannot legally do so. Freud describes melancholia as, “a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-reviling’s, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 244). “Canción Mixteca” shares much in common with Freud’s melancholia. The speaker experiences loss of homeland as depression, and in his unattainable desire to return is perpetually lost.

I meditate on “Canción Mixteca” in order to register its structures of feeling within the Mexican, Mexican-American, and Latina/o landscape.³ To that end, I am interested in exploring how Linda Ronstadt’s performance embodies “Canción Mixteca.” Generally regarded as one of the best interpretive artists of her time, the New York Times praised *Canciones De Mi Padre* (1987) in part because “singing in Spanish, she lends more than just her voice and appropriate stylistic embellishments to the material. She gives her whole body to the songs” (Holden “Linda Ronstadt Explores”). Ronstadt’s singing body inflects a dramatic expression onto “Canción Mixteca” through subtle tonal changes, elongated notes, and controlled breaks. It is the ‘grain’ as Roland Barthes describes—“the body in the voice as it sings” (*Image, Music, Text* 188). But what of the language, the lyrics, *on* the performer’s body? What does it mean when a second-generation Chicana from Tucson, Arizona dressed as a *charra* in a fictional town square sings of a nostalgic desire to return home? For Ronstadt, home may signify any number of sites including Tucson, Mexico, or perhaps Aztlán or Blue Bayou.⁴ However, in its performance, as one of a

³ And beyond, as seen in the 2010 version of “Canción Mixteca” by Mexican norteño-band, Los Tigres del Norte and traditional Irish band, The Chieftains.

⁴ “Blue Bayou,” another song of heartfelt desire to return, was originally recorded by Roy Orbison in 1963 but became a standard in Linda Ronstadt’s repertoire after her successful re-release of the song in 1977.

number of her father's songs, home is geo-culturally linked to Mexico. And unlike "Blue Bayou," there is no hopeful *someday* return to her father's land. When Linda Ronstadt sings "Oh tierra del sol/ suspiro por verte," it is a longing to view the homeland as her father did. An intimate sense of knowing the landscape that, as Ronstadt's *Old Mexico* performance shows, is deeply obscured and problematic.

This chapter examines Latinas, like Ronstadt, who long to return to their *patria* and asks what happens when they get there. I focus on women who travel home in search of an ancestral past (or in the exception of Michele Serros, college language credit) to examine how inaccessibility might provide an opportunity for other affective and political attachments beyond a nation-state. I examine the work of Lorna Dee Cervantes, Cristina Henríquez, and Michele Serros not as flawed or reflective of a naïve desire for acceptance, but to discuss constructions, and policing of identities that produce "bad" subjects. Cervantes, Henríquez, and Serros travel to their respective homelands alone. These are locations where the women have genealogical roots but otherwise have had limited physical access to. Thus their expressions of self-discovery and community are devoid of the overt familial narratives found in texts such as Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo* (2002), or Angie Cruz's *Let It Rain Coffee* (2005). Cervantes', Henríquez's, and Serros' negotiation of intra- and inter- national relations provides a deeper understanding of Latinas' multiple and fragmented identities. Their vexed national and cultural affiliations are further compounded with a realization of the U.S. power and privilege they assume while abroad. Like Ronstadt's embodied performance, the writer's respective protagonist embodies a certain air of *difference* that marks them as outsider in their respective sites.

Homeland

Lorna Dee Cervantes published “Oaxaca, 1974” in her first collection of poetry, *Emplumada* (1981). Cervantes wrote the poem at 19 years of age while living in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca during what she describes as a “massive change of consciousness” (Cervantes “What’s Happened in Oaxaca”). Originally titled “Heritage,” the poem describes Cervantes’ sense of alienation among the people there. As Shelia Marie Contreras rightfully observes, the (implicit) decision to make Oaxaca the point of arrival is significant because of the Mexican state’s indigenous history and population. “Located in the south, next to Chiapas, Oaxaca is one of the most heavily populated indigenous areas of Mexico. Approximately 35 percent of the population of Oaxaca is defined as indigenous...” (qtd. in Contreras 152). If Cervantes, as the original title suggests, is in search of an inherited culture, it is grounded in indigeneity. Cervantes thus attaches her self to an Indian past that is still very much active in the present. The short poem marks a crushing break to Cervantes’ expectations of and imagined relationship to the space that is pitted against the experience of her lived reality.

The poem opens by stating, “México/ I look for you all day in the streets of Oaxaca” (44). Already in the country, Cervantes has yet to locate something that registers as homeland. It is a desire to see and name a person or object that feels distinctly Mexican. Mexican-ness is presumed elusive as it both envelopes and elides Cervantes. It is a spirit that she expects to find among the indigenous population that resides there. Indigenous Studies scholar Jodi Byrd explains, “As a philosophical sign, the Indian is the transit, the field through which presignifying polyvocality is re/introduced into the signifying regime and signs begin to proliferate through a system of becomings... that serves all regimes of signs” (19). It is through the image of the

Oaxacan *indigena* that Cervantes hopes to claim her *mexicanidad*.⁵ As elaborated below, Cervantes arrives in Oaxaca, Mexico with the assumption that through her dark skin and Indian features she can belong.

Cervantes quickly learns that Mexico is not something to be found but, much to her dismay, something she simply cannot access. It is in a moment of realization, of “finding” Mexico that she writes, “But México gags/ ¡Esputa! / on this bland pochaseed” (44). The image of Mexico choking on Cervantes describes an almost-but-not-quite entry into the national body. Cervantes is already located in Mexico as it tries to spit her up. It is a rejection that is intensified as the nation decries “esputa.” Raúl Homero Villa notes, “‘esputa’ plays on the aural similarities and signified meanings of *escupar* (to spit) and *es puta* (she is a whore)” (52). The “whore-like” transgression here could be a Malinche rendering because of Lorna Dee Cervantes’ American upbringing.⁶ As a result, Mexico spits up, out, and on the “bland pochaseed.” Further elaborated in Chapter 3’s discussion of Sandra de la Loza, Cervantes is ultimately labeled an undesirable Mexican subject because of her ties to the United States. She is named *pocha* by lack of language and culture. To the gagging Mexican figure she is bland—not enough color, not enough flavor and thus unworthy of Mexican recognition.

In an attempt to address her “lack,” Cervantes returns to the street as her “brown body searches... for the dye that will color my thoughts” to then frustratingly exclaim, “I didn’t ask to be brought up tonta!” (44). As with Henríquez and Serros, Cervantes begins her journey

⁵ While inspiring women of color feminism, and work on borders and *mestizaje*, Cherrie Moraga’s utopic vision of “Queer Aztlán” also makes questionable claims to indigeneity and tribal affiliations.

⁶ Malinche is a Nahuatl woman from the early 16th century. Mistress and translator to Hernán Cortés, Malinche gave birth to who is considered to be the first mestizo. Malinche is a contentious figure in Mexican and Mexican-American folklore. To refer to someone, especially a woman, as Malinche or *malinchista* is to call her a traitor to Mexico.

assuming that phenotype and pan-Latina identity would secure acceptance. Instead, like the perpetually lost melancholic figure, she wanders Oaxaca for a hue that can color more than her already dark skin. Cervantes seeks something that will mark her indigeneity to thereby walk the streets with a claim to Mexico. Instead, as cultural outsider, she is given a “name [that] hangs around me like a loose tooth” (44). The name referred to in the poem is left open to interpretation. It may very well be her Anglo sounding name (as Shelia Marie Contreras contends) or any of her other names/labels—esputa, tonta, pochaseed, American, Chicana but *not* Mexicana.

Walking in Oaxaca as Other, Cervantes is an attraction to a group of children who “run to me laughing/ spinning me blind and silly. /They call me words of another language” (44). Shelia Marie Contreras rightfully reads this dizzying feeling of exclusion as similar to “[Gloria] Anzaldúa’s image of the mestiza who finds herself ‘norteadá’” (152). To name the state of being after blind spinning “norteadá,” captures the nuanced meaning of the term and the subject. Born in San Francisco and raised in San Jose, Lorna Dee Cervantes’ knowledge of Mexican culture is mediated by a northern California and North American perspective. Oaxaca leaves her *norteadá* (out of sorts), because she is from *el norte*. Furthermore, while the children read her difference as a form of play, older generations lament her disconnect. Cervantes describes, “Old women [who] know my secret/ ‘Es la culpa de los antepasados’” (44). Upon first glance, the old women seem most sympathetic to Cervantes’ plight and blame ancestors for her feeling of homeless-ness. The ancestor’s fault is in not cultivating a strong Mexican identification from a young age as much as for leaving Mexico *to* the United States in the first place. Chicana studies scholar Edén E. Torres reinforces this reading by stating “that the women of Mexico do not blame the Chicana for her lack of Spanish and cultural fluency, but the historical circumstances that have separated her

from Mexico” (121). However in knowing her secret and blaming ancestors, the old women are not described as protecting, inviting, let alone accepting Cervantes. I would argue that the known secret is further utilized as a way of labeling Cervantes an outsider. The last lines of “Oaxaca, 1974” read: “Blame it on the old ones. /They give me a name/ that fights me” (44). The “old ones” who contentiously name Cervantes can be read as either ancestors or the old women. Sympathy does not mean acceptance, especially toward a subject like Cervantes who arrives already having thought herself one of them. Yet, it is this unexpected rebuffing—the name that fights—that provides Lorna Dee Cervantes with the critical consciousness that culture is not necessarily something one is born into but rather a working and ongoing collaboration between self and others that is always in process.

Homecoming

Where Lorna Dee Cervantes arrives in Mexico with the expectation of finding a pan-Indigenous family, Miraflores Reid goes to Panama to find her father and in turn her fatherland. Mira (as she is more affectionately called), the lead character of Cristina Henríquez’s *The World in Half* (2009), is a 20-year-old geophysical science student at the University of Chicago. Estranged from her Panamanian father Gatún Gallardo, Mira discovers a trove of letters from Gatún to her mother, Catherine. The letters detail Catherine’s affair with Gatún while living in Panama City with her then husband, U.S. Marine Brant Strickland. Pregnant with Gatún’s child, Catherine returns to the U.S. and shortly after divorces Brant. Mira reads of Gatún’s appeals for them to return to Panama or for him to go to the United States. Two choices that Catherine cannot monetarily or morally do while living under the supervision of her parents. As a result,

Mira's decades long belief that her father had abandoned them is proven false. Her resolve is an elaborate plan to go to Panama City, find her father, and thereby find her Panamanian identity.

Mira unknowingly carries signs of Panama and her parents' sordid relationship through name. During the course of Catherine and Gatún's affair he works at the Panama Canal coordinating the passage of ships and is named after one of the three locks that form the canal. Mira follows suit and is also christened after a lock that is closest to the Pacific Ocean. Long heralded as a great U.S. accomplishment, the Panama Canal (and in turn, Gatún and Mira's father/daughter relationship) speaks to a fraught history and neocolonial relationship with the United States. The ship canal that connects the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean also splits the country in two. As Claudia Milian and Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo describe:

The splitting of Panama and U.S. History gives prominence to an event with manifold—even split—responses within this interoceanic sphere of representation from both sides. This fissure signifies what Caroline Levander and Walter Mignolo proposed in their co-edited edition of [*The Global South* journal]: that the ordering and disordering assumed in the 'Global South' framework also turn 'toward the subject that wants to know and understand' (3).

Thus, unlike Cervantes' rebuff in Oaxaca, Mira's arrival is punctuated by moments of strong self-recognition as Panamanian. Gatún and Mira's relationship mirrors the order, disorder, and split history of the canal's construction.

Upon visiting the Panama Canal for the first time with newfound friend and eventual romantic interest Danilo, Mira sees her name etched on the front of the visitors' center. She exclaims: "For a girl who was never able to find a key chain with her name on it or a personalized pencil, or a hat with her name stitched in above the bill, it's a shock. But a welcome

shock. My name is familiar here. If it belongs here, maybe I could too” (Henríquez 117). With very little intimate connection to her father’s home, Mira experiences a sense of belonging through name she had never experienced in the United States. Moreover, in this momentary interpellation, Mira embodies the history and location of the canal. Mira welcomes this disruption to her way of being in the world—it is now a space where her name has meaning. Unlike the name that Cervantes fights, Miraflores (the name/ building) takes up space in a way that allows Mira (the person) to believe she can as well. However, unlike the Miraflores lock that is fixed in the canal, Mira will eventually return the United States. Thus, where Cervantes wants to know Mexico to its very essence, Mira seeks to learn Panama in the time that she is there. That is, she wants to understand its streets and roads, memorize dates and facts. Mira’s experience of outsidership is one of fear of being tested. To assuage this risk, her approach is to always know and be in control of the information as seen in her strong reliance on tourist guidebooks.

The Exiled Tourist

When Miraflores arrives to Panama City and makes her way to the passport checkpoint she observes the ordering of passengers. One line is marked for Panamanian citizens and the other for everyone else. Mira walks to the line for everyone else while gazing at the Panamanian line with a desire to join as a fellow (partial) citizen. She remarks on the Panamanian women’s bags, and gold watches and admires the Panamanian men’s clothing and facial hair before ending the description by remarking on their dark skin. Dark skin that is much darker than Mira’s own. Mira wants to stand with them but also acknowledges she would be out of place. In this moment, like when she sees her name at the Panama Canal, Mira feels the almost-but-not-quite reaction

that gags Cervantes' Mexico. "I want them to know that I'm not just any tourist visiting their country, that I have a claim to this place and for a reason to being here, that I belong to them at least a little bit. I wonder whether, or how, they would treat me different if they knew" (Henríquez 34). Arriving to no one, Mira feels a need to stake a claim to the land as a Panamanian by birthright. If "they" knew she belonged then she could traverse the city as insider, as one of them. In this passage, Mira is also intent on claiming her self as other than a tourist. The association is that as "tourist," Mira is less than. Thus, while not overtly stating it, Mira implicitly associates her form of belonging to Panama as closer to an exile. That is, up to the moment that she discovered the letters from her father she was barred from her country of origin. The familial baggage that had distanced Mira from "returning" home was lifted as she read that he desired to be in her life. She "returns" so that Panama can embrace her, if "only a little bit."

Writing on the differences and similarities between exile and tourism, Caren Kaplan notes:

For the exile, the site of the authentic is continually displaced, located in another country. For the tourist, authenticity is elsewhere as well, and the present is inauthentic. The figure of the exile represents a single break with the past, while the tourist negotiates the numerous riffs and fragmentations of experience. But the belief in a truer, more meaningful existence somewhere else is shared by exile and tourist alike. Both figures, when mystified into primary subject positions, represent melancholic seekers after a lost substance or unity that can never be attained. (64)

Miraflores is both exile and tourist. The way she understood her life and self is altered upon reading her father's letters. And thus in search of truth and authenticity she travels to Panama. The possibility or desire for wholeness is transposed onto the image of Gatún. Mira is then the melancholic seeker, travelling south to find him. And similar to Kaplan's findings, the melancholic subject is never able to attain the lost substance. Mira is eventually put in contact with Gatún's sister, Isla. It is from her aunt that she learns the search has been in vain as Gatún had died years earlier. Panama—as home, as father, as place—is inaccessible no matter how much she prepared.

Nevertheless, in preparation for her trip, Miraflores goes to the travel section of her local bookstore in search of a Panama guidebook. "I chose the one with a cover photograph of thatch-roofed huts on stilts over water, a line of them receding into the horizon. As I looked at my hands, my stomach tightened. I remember thinking that it was like looking at a piece of myself laid bare. There was something about it, the way it was so unfamiliar to me" (Henríquez 85). Devoid of any first-hand experiences of Panama, the guidebook will be Miraflores' informant on the journey. It will tell her how to prepare, what sights to see, and places she should avoid. The guidebook is Miraflores first encounter with Panama and the realization that she in fact is going on the journey. She looks down at the cover that stands in for the country as a whole. In the thatch-roofed hut on stilts over the water, is an image that invites the spectator to relax and enjoy the tranquil surroundings. For an American traveller, especially one like Miraflores in Chicago, this is an exotic and tropical image. It is one that Miraflores does not see herself in and thus causes anxious stomach pangs of unfamiliarity.

Even after reading the guidebook, Miraflores confesses to having learned only superficial information. "I know everything. I've read about it in my guidebook—how much to pay for a

taxi from the airport, what the temperature will be like...I [still] don't know what really to expect, underneath all that" (Henríquez 26). There is a stark difference between knowing and experiencing, thus recalling the image of Lorna Dee Cervantes as she desperately seeks to relate to her surroundings. Miraflores is similarly self-assured in her ability to navigate the logistics of the travel. It is what is beyond the guidebook and the day-to-day interactions that concern her. After all, its purpose is to contextualize the area that she hoped would take her to Gatún. When Miraflores does use her learned knowledge it only further distances her as a tourist. Danilo takes Miraflores to Old Panama hoping to impress her. When they arrive she not only names the location but is able to relay its history in relation to their surroundings. "I tell him I read about [Panamá La Vieja] in my guidebook. 'We call it Panamá Viejo,' he says. Then with considerable amusement he asks, 'What else did they tell you in that guidebook?'" (Henríquez 57). There are ways of knowing and understanding the area that move beyond the guidebook. That requires Mirabel to move throughout Panama City. In this way describing what Michel de Certeau sees as the difference between a voyeur as passive observer and walker. "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statement uttered... It thus seems possible to give a preliminary definition of walking as a space of enunciation" (98). It is only after Miraflores has walked Panama City, explored its streets and interacted with the surroundings that she experiences and knows it. Miraflores goes on to express shame when encountering other locations she has read about. It is the difference between Miraflores' "I read," and Danilo's "we call" it that substantiates *knowing about* and simply *knowing*.

Identities: A(merican) to Z(onian)

Throughout the course of the project I turn to the body and its relation to the world around it. That is, the way in which bodies are felt, feel, and expressive often beyond the control of the subject. Like Ronstadt, Cervantes, and (as discussed below) Michele Serros, Miraflores Reid cannot blend into Panama as she moves within its borders. There is a foreignness that is perpetually attached to her body and easily discernible to locals. As discussed above, while she experiences instances of self-recognition (as in her name on the visitors' center), it is a Panamanian identification that is brief and internally produced. Miraflores' Panamanian identity is fleeting especially when interacting with locals. Thus, "difference is not simply found in the body, but established as a relation between bodies: *this suggests that the particular body carries traces of differences that are registered in the bodies of others*" [emphasis in the original] (Ahmed "Strange Encounters" 44). It is this ongoing interplay that both raises questions of origin in people she encounters, but also causes offense when she is labeled outsider.

When Danilo first learns Miraflores is named after the canal locks he asks, "But you're not Panamanian, are you? Are you a Zonian?" 'A what?' 'I guess not, then. They know who they are. They're really fucking proud of it'" (Henríquez 48). Although, Miraflores has the signifiers of a Panamanian identity, they bump up against Danilo's local knowing. He has already signaled her foreign without needing to finish the question by beginning with the rebuttal. If not Panamanian than the next identifying label is Zonian. Named for U.S. foreigners who lived in the Panama Canal Zone during North American control from 1903 to 1979, they constituted "a population of over fifty thousand administrators, technicians, canal workers, soldiers, and their dependents, plus nine thousand workers who lived on the other side of the line, the [Canal Zone] enclave constituted one of the largest U.S. overseas communities from World War II through

1979” (Donoghue 4). Through Mira’s questioning response, Danilo is once again able to conclude that she is not local because Zonians know who they are and are “fucking” proud to tell you. For as knowledgeable as Miraflores is on local history and landmarks, she is unaware of such a larger local identity. Furthermore, it is U.S. presence that brought her mother’s first husband to Panama and thereby set the stage for Catherine and Gatún’s encounter. Within this framing, Zonian would be her most accurate identification. Instead, Miraflores responds, “I’m half-Panamanian,’ ... even though I’m nervous to let the words out of my mouth. Because is he going to ask me questions I don’t really know the answers to?” (Henríquez 48). To utter “Panamanian” is a complicated action that is loaded in history that moves beyond her search for Gatún, and to his relation with her mother. It is also in this scene that the reader sees why Miraflores studied the guidebook so closely. For Miraflores, identity is tied to misrecognition. This illegibility leads to a series of questions in search of authenticity. She is, after all, Panamanian by way of her father but lost as to what this identity means and how it functions especially beyond the U.S.

Identity is then a performative affect that is signaled by speech, style, and behavior. The more time Miraflores spends in Panama alongside Danilo, the more she takes on his way of being. Danilo attempts to compliment Miraflores on this change when he tells her, “‘you almost seem like you live here. If you don’t talk too much, people might believe it.... You don’t talk like a Panamanian.’ [Causing Miraflores to] look away so that he won’t see how that stung” (Henríquez 118). Danilo observes the way Miraflores has begun to embody a physical language—de Certeau’s allusion to the mobile and bodily enunciations—that *almost* sound local. He does this while simultaneously critiquing Mira’s audible speech as not good enough. In not sounding Panamanian, Danilo further alludes to a dimensionality in local identity practices that

can only happen over time. And, Miraflores is hurt. Hurt because Spanish was one of her few tangible connections she had to her Panamanian roots. Lacking any other cultural signifiers, Spanish was the something she felt equipped with when landing in an otherwise foreign land—it was her only tie to “home.” Although Mira has faced foreignness in Panama (as seen when a taxi driver attempts to charge her more because she is American), there was always a sense of distance and uncertainty at *what* gave her away. It is Danilo’s intimate relation and ability to name the difference, the lack, which injures Mira the most.

Throughout Miraflores’ journey was the expectation that she would eventually make her way back to Chicago. The plan, after all, was quite simply to find Gatún Gallardo. Mira could not expect anything more than that without knowing what her father’s reaction might be and what could happen next. Thus, her daily outings alongside Danilo were largely unplanned and spontaneous. Yet, it was he that provided Mira with the most valuable cultural experiences. The ways of being she could return with that was distinctly Panamanian. Yet, while culturally fulfilling for Mira, leaves little for Danilo in return. In the midst of Mira’s oscillation between tourist and exile, Danilo also takes the ambiguous shape of friend or tour guide. This is especially felt when Mira makes universal claims based on her North American experience. For example, when discussing Panamanian history with Danilo, Mira extorts:

“The boundaries of this place are always changing... I mean you can’t say a place belongs to a country just because of the land it’s on. A long time ago this land was Spain’s, so the city would have belonged to Spain. Now the land is Panamá’s, so the city belongs to Panamá. In a thousand years it could be China’s, so it would belong to China... I’m just saying it’s all political. They’re just different names

for the same place. That land doesn't belong to anyone. It only belongs to itself"
(Henríquez 59)

What Miraflores posits is a break in nationalist discourse. Since boundaries and borders are always changing, to claim or believe in ownership over any one physical site is naïve to these shifts. What the image of Mira's self-governing land omits, however, are the people that have resided and do reside there. Furthermore, Mira's ultimate claim that "geography is an illusion," overlooks the real implications of borders for those who cannot easily traverse them (59).

Miraflores speaks as an American national who can travel to Panama in search of roots and return to the U.S. To say geography is an illusion works in her favor—she is a global citizen who can access any site she desires. Under this model, Panama is no longer illegible and she is no longer foreign.

Shortly after learning of her father's death, Mira receives a call stating that her mother has had an accident and is in the hospital, thus bringing her journey to a close. The departure is swift, moving from a bus stop conversation to the view outside an airplane. "The first thing I notice when I get off the plane is what a relief it is to hear English again, to understand immediately... I'm struck, too, by how contained everything is: lanes of traffic are perfectly ordered, grass grows in even plots, trees thrive in mounds of mulch, building faces are austere. The air is cleaner" (260). Mira has returned and describes a relief in the ease in which she can access her surroundings. Having tried so hard to learn being Panamanian, she returns to the U.S. with these experiences as souvenirs. Through a flurry of events that follow, Danilo eventually makes his way to the United States for a short-visit that frames the ending of the novel. As he is dropped off at the airport he turns to Miraflores and asks, "'And you'll come visit Panamá sometimes soon?' 'Yes.' 'You know where I am... You know how to find me.' [Miraflores

reflects on this and thinks to herself:] And that might be the end, or the end might come later, when one day I make it back to Panama, or one day I don't and continue my life in a different direction..." (303-4). Mira highlights her choice to travel or go back to Panama, find Danilo, and perhaps choose to remain there as much as she may remain in the United States and continue her life with his visit but a distant memory. What, then, of the time in Panama, Miraflores' experience of homeland, and her desire to blend in? Panamanian through birth does not equate accessibility of acceptance and thus in the loss of her father results in the loss of *patria* that, while mournful, does not deter or haunt her in the way it does for Cervantes. And unlike Ronstadt, she cannot sing the songs of a father she never knew to begin with.

Homesickness

While exploring the various degrees of affiliation to homeland experienced by Latinas from the U.S., I am struck by a repeated investment in the performance of identity. As seen throughout the chapter, this performativity is displayed as much through body and language as it is through style. In the women's desire to find home, is the hope that through the correct presentation of self they can assume a role as cultural insider. The women in this chapter have sought out their expeditions in order to understand a birthed identity that they were otherwise foreign to. Writing generally on the theme of the immigrant experience in Chicano literature, Gilbert Muller remarks:

Consciousness of Mexican identity or *mexicanidad* is ultimately the source of strength for Mexican-American protagonists of contemporary Chicano fiction....

These migrant souls manage the bipolar nature of the border as well as the national or metropolitan sphere precisely when their roots (*raíces*) and spiritual

values (*escencias*) are sufficiently strong to assert a countervailing cultural nationalism. (89)

According to Muller's account, to successfully navigate the bi-cultural Chicano experience is to feel adequately versed in knowledge of self (roots) and have spiritual grounding. This is seen to a certain degree in Ronstadt's desire to perform songs of her father, Cervantes' search for Indian Mexico, and while not Chicana—Miraflores desire to seek out her *patria*/father. Given this trajectory, the return home is nostalgic, painful, and self-affirming.

It is within this context of homeland as nostalgic and traumatic that I turn to Michele Serros' "Let's Go Mexico!" Published as part of her collection of short stories *How to be a Chicana Role Model* (2000), "Let's Go Mexico!" describes Serros' return as part of a study abroad program. Serros' experience in the city of Taxco shares many of the same concerns described by the figures above. However, the anxiety of identity performance that Serros experiences is not fixed in Mexico but is something she has continually deals with in her American, Mexican, and Chicana identity. This negotiation of self is most evident in her publication titles. *How to be a Chicana Role Model* follows her first collection of poetry and short stories, *Chicana Falsa* (1994). Serros' transition from 'Fake Chicana' to a 'Chicana Role Model' between publications is a response to her rendering by the public sphere. As discussed in Chapter 4, current manifestations of the term "Chicano/a" run the risk of narrowly defining subjects and thus naming them 'good' or 'bad.' Within this dichotomy, pre-publication Serros is false or fake while post-publication Serros is now proclaimed a 'Role Model.' However, the feeling of inauthenticity remains and colors her work and experience within Chicano and Mexicano encounters.

Father Land/Mother Tongue

While in Taxco, Serros recalls a poetry reading at a Chicana writer's conference in which a woman in the audience asks her a question in Spanish. ““And when I answered her in my choppy Spanglish, she got really offended and upitty on me, totally made me feel like I didn't belong there.” [Her friend Eva asks,] ‘Was she Mexicana?’ ‘Yeah, well, Chicana.’ ‘They’re the worst’” (Serros 112).⁷ The exchange between Serros and Eva highlights the policing of Chicana identity. “They are the worst” in their ability to produce shame. It is the shame that is inflicted upon Miraflores for not speaking like a Panamanian, and Lorna Dee Cervantes’ frustrated exclamation that she did not mean to grow up a *tonta*. To add insult to injury, Serros goes on to state that the same woman “commend[ed] this white man on his sad little attempts with Spanish” (112). The trauma Serros experiences in this moment of rejection and disavowal reflect the way bodies are recognized and governed differently based on time and place.⁸

As part of the study abroad program in Mexico, Serros’ relationship to U.S./Mexico ethnic constructs is once again strained and reaches global levels as it is read through her body. At the welcome luncheon, the students are served a plate of apricot-marinated quail in roasted chipotle sauce and corn pudding. “A Scottish student asked me, ‘Is this how you ate at home, growing up?’ ‘Oh yeah,’ I bragged, thinking of the Hamburger Helper, Spanish Style, my mom whipped up on payday Fridays” (104). In the Scottish student’s mis/recognition of Serros we see the image of “tourist” function on a scale of proximity that is relative to his perspective—white signifying student/tourist and brown meaning native. Unlike Miraflores, Serros’ is placed in

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, the quotes to follow are from Serros’ “Let’s Go Mexico!” in *How to be a Chicana Role Model*

⁸ Serros again describes shame at the moment she recognizes that two years later she “still felt lousy” about the conference (113).

closer proximity to Mexico through the Scottish student (and other white students) body. He is able to identify her as non-white and thus closer to the other brown bodies that surround him. Yet, it is also amiss because of Serros' fourth generation cultural divide to Mexico. She goes "home," but not for a reclamation of *raíces* or to define her mestiza consciousness. Instead it was partly to read her friend Olga's poetry in its original language, understand what rock musician Beck says when he sings in Spanish, talk about white people behind their backs, and largely for the foreign-language credit that would securing an on time graduation. As a result, her venture into Mexican terrain along with an overwhelmingly large population of white students is nerve wrecking because it forces Serros to reevaluate her identity to Mexico, the United States, and *Chicanidad*.

Güerito/as

In preparation for the trip, Serros reads through the program catalog filled with pictures of what to expect: "there were pictures of students (white) lounging around the schools' swimming pool (aqua blue) being served piña coladas by waiters (brown)... two female students (white) buying jewelry (silver) from native artisans (brown). I looked at the photos and wondered how I'd fit in" (103). In this color scheme, Serros does not fit into the photographs' narrative. While she cannot identify as "student" because of her own brown skin, she also finds it difficult to (not so much identify but) relate to the Mexican figures. Fitting in is a difficult task well before even formally being accepted for the program. As part of the application process, Serros stands in line waiting to be interviewed in Spanish. In line ahead of her are two other Taxco-bound students (white) whom she is able to eavesdrop on during their interviews. "I grew nervous. Their Spanish was so good! When it was my turn all I could think about was how well

the other two students had spoken. Finally, after an excruciating ten-minute conversation en español, the two interviewers (white) smiled and said, ‘Have a great time in Taxco!’” (103). During the entirety of the interview exchange, Serros is fixated on the white bodies that seem so much more knowing of what is supposed to be *her* culture. It is the *pochaseed* identity that Lorna Dee Cervantes confronted and tried to correct while in Mexico. Except when Michele Serros nervously speaks Spanish it is whiteness that either accepts or denies her entry to Mexico.

In comparison to the white students who also participate in the program, *her language* skills are lacking. Spanish is, after all, supposed to be something Serros has been immersed in as a Chicana living in Southern California. “Debates surrounding language usage within Latino communities are long-standing and contentious. The retention or loss of Spanish sometimes employed as a cultural barometer to register supposed ‘authenticity’ of a given Latino group or individual within a group” (Romero and Habell-Pallán 11). The college counselor comments on this culturally perceived language incompetency when incredulously asking about her Spanish ability and previous visits to Mexico. Interestingly it is a blond white surfer boy, Mark. W., that mediates Serros relationship to “home.” “We often extended weekend jaunts to a full five days in Ensenada... Of course I’d been to Mexico. But then I remembered CeCe, who said Baja doesn’t count as Mexico” (102). As a largely tourist town in Baja California, Ensenada’s geographic presence within Mexico is discounted based on its proximity to the U.S. and high American tourist population. Authenticity is measured against a perceived inauthenticity that Michele Serros comes to embody. She is the ‘Chicana Falsa,’ from which others measure themselves. It is a perceived lack of language skills and cultural history that declare her inauthentic to a Chicana/o audience. And it is these expected cultural codes that she is once again forced to engage with once she arrives to Taxco.

Once with her host, Señora Saldana, Serros is roomed with a group of (unsurprisingly) white girls whom she endearingly labels White Socks (Dandruff Sock, Pink Sock, Clinique Sock, PMS Sock, and Slutty Sock). “While the white socks marveled at the quaintness of Mexican culture, I could only feel so fairly familiar with it. From waking up to roosters crowing each dawn to keeping tabs on the amount of Manteca left in its red box in the fridge, this was what I was used to in my childhood home in Oxnard. But then again, I never had no White Sock in my house correcting my Spanish” (105-6). As with the other figures in this chapter, there are moments of familiarity. Instances in which they are able to see themselves reflected back in their respective home countries. Yet, while providing them with a sense of brief ephemeral belonging, these instances also remind them just how far away they actually are. Having grown up in the agricultural town of Oxnard, CA, Serros hears familiarity in the sounds of livestock just as she acknowledges kitchen staples that are shared among people of Taxco and Oxnard. However, the glaring difference in these settings is the policing of proper Spanish by the White Socks. “No, Michele, it’s *el* problema, not *la* problema” (106). In an attempt to “help” Serros out with her language acquisition, the White Socks are constantly providing tips and suggestions. This information is not limited to language as they are also readily prepared to dispense cultural facts as well.

Slutty Sock describes the Mexican men she encounters as having uncontrollable sexual urges. “I’ve gotta make sure I keep track of my pill, ‘cause these men are just so into making babies and starting families and I ain’t gonna be no green card for no one... I got career goals. That’s why I am here in the fucking first place. Being bilingual is only gonna advance my opportunities in the workforce” (106). Slutty Sock’s description of the Mexican men she sexually engages with, reinscribes stereotypes that are tied to Latino hyper-masculinity and American

immigration panic. They are unable to control a natural, instinctive desire for sex. Furthermore, this insatiable sexual drive is coupled by a Mexican instinct to populate. While Slutty Sock does not explicitly state it, there is an underlying assumption that her whiteness is a large factor to her sexual attraction. Within the context of Taxco, as populated by a large student population, whiteness is equated with American citizenship and thus through impregnation access to a green card. Throughout Slutty Socks' diatribe of Mexican men, she is beyond scope of analysis. It is the Mexican men's unrepressed sexual urges that frame her encounters. Slutty Sock, on the other hand, is in Mexico to learn Spanish so that she can advance her career once back in the United States. Unlike Serros, her whiteness, coupled by the ability to speak Spanish is what makes her an attractive subject on both sides of the border.

Casa Lara

The White Socks' foreignness facilitates their movement in Mexico, while their domestic familiarity and Spanish-language skills mark them exceptional U.S. citizens. Michele Serros travels within similar geographic terrain and yet is always cause for suspicion. When the White Socks find out Serros is planning on exploring the area solo they inform her the guidebook *Let's Go Mexico!* advises women in Mexico not to travel alone. Serros responds, "Well, maybe tourist-looking women... But I mean, I think I can blend in" to which PMS Sock replies, "Yeah, until you open your mouth!" (109). Miraflores and Danilo's exchange immediately come to mind. It is the same hurtful critique that while meant in jest, is nevertheless a reflection on Serros' inability to pass as Mexican in her so-called cultural homeland. Serros recognizes this flaw as well as she decides "to wear baggy jeans, an oversized flannel, and [put] my cash in my bra...If *Let's Go Mexico!* said women should be careful traveling alone, I wouldn't take any

chances” (109-10). The guidebook, as mentioned above, is an important resource for the traveling subjects. As it suggests regional attractions, it also warns the inexperienced traveler on how to move. Thus, the guidebook can be read as an ideological apparatus that through diversion and caution create an imaginary map of Mexico based on where one can and cannot go. Serros’ decision to not take her chances highlights her unfamiliarity with the space, and insecurity at not looking local.

Michele Serros travels to Mexico only to find herself immersed in whiteness. Fed up with her living situation, she decides to find alternate housing and ends up living with Señora Saldana’s rival host—Lara. Serros describes immediately feeling at home in comparison to her time with the White Socks. After only living with Lara for a short time, she is even invited to a local wedding as her guest. Serros who had long felt ostracized during her time in Mexico was finally in a space where she felt that she belonged. The invitation to the wedding was a distinction that created an opportunity for Lara and Serros to bond. For example, Serros lets Lara wear her Guess? sandals and Lara allows Serros to borrow a lace hankie. It is an exchange that marks a shift in Serros’ experience and association with Mexico.

As Serros and Lara enter the reception they see her previous host, Señora Saldana arrive with three White Socks in tow. “Lara only had one student—me. ‘But, hey’—I nudged her in the ribs with my elbow—‘I’m *brown*’” (114). Señora Saldana and the white girls serve as a reminder for both Lara and Serros of what they lack. Serros’ observation that Lara *only* had one student is indicative of a larger socio-economic divide between her and Señora Saldana. The economy of Taxco is largely supported by student tourism, and host families receive income for each student they take in. Señora Saldana has three white girls because she has the space to accommodate them as opposed to Lara. Thus, the students serve as a form of social and classed currency in

which Señora Saldana comes out on top. Serros attempts to assuage the situation by reminding Lara that while Señora Saldana may have three students they are all white. Lara's one and only, on the other hand, is brown. Given that the white student population seems to overrun the city, Serros' brownness is a "special commodity" that while humorous does not in fact do much for Lara's clout.

While Lara provides Michele Serros with a stronger sense of belonging, it is an association that is interjected by reminders of her foreignness as represented by the White Socks. Once the reception is well under way, Serros describes the manner in which the "[Brown boy guests] desperately vied for attention from the White Socks and I immediately felt lonely and out of place while I watched the White Socks' sweaty bodies get fanned by the cloth napkins of the local boys" (114). In this instance Serros longs to be desired by a brown boy in the way that the White Socks are so easily able to do so. While such abject reactions to the White Socks seem to position Serros directly against them, it is rather what they represent that is being called into question. Although Serros does not arrive to Mexico on a journey of self-discovery, there was an expectation that she might adjust in a way that the white students could not. Instead it is Serros who is perpetually lost by her inability to access the culture in the way that White Socks just seem to know.

Lara instinctively takes Serros' hand and guides her to the dance floor. "We create a group of single women who danced in a circle. It was actually pretty fun. It was like the old days of the Odyssey 'cept [sic] none of the nearby dancing men were wearing eyeliner or lip-synching to Duran Duran" (115). Lara is able to read Serros' feeling of outsidership and in this act gestures toward acceptance and belonging. As a group of single women, they take up space among traditional male/female couplings. Furthermore, as a recent divorcée, the assertion of

space that does not require a man is as important to Lara as it is to Serros. Dancing, if only momentarily, becomes an opportunity to establish community and thereby assert agency for the women. In this way gesturing toward Ramón Rivera-Servera's work on the possibilities of the dance floor for queer *Latinidad*. He writes:

Here perhaps, within the context that showcases spontaneous social relations and the skills developed to thrive within them, lies the utopian potential of club dancing. This is where the presentness of performance, its ability to do something, and the versatility of improvisation, the possibility of transformation and change, become the driving forces of dance club culture. (263)

It is thus of no surprise that the circle takes Serros back to the Los Angeles night club The Odyssey where such dance circles, affective attachments and possibilities were not out of the ordinary.

As the evening comes to a close, Lara and Serros make their way back home. Once there, Serros discovers small bottles of tequila, party favors, and chocolates Lara had placed in her purse. They decide to spend the evening drinking, eating, and commenting on the reception. It is a form of community building that Serros had not previously encountered in Mexico. In many ways that was because this exchange was not determined by language-fluency or overt Mexican cultural knowledge but rather being in the company of one another. Their gossip turn to Señora Saldana and the White Socks: "She told me Señora Saldana's dress was tighter than the time she wore it to last year's big wedding and I laughed. Then I told her about one of the White Socks asking about the bowl-shaped tostadas, like at El Torito, but she just looked confused. As much as I tried to explain the humor in it, she didn't quite understand" (115). In order to understand the humor behind the White Sock's tostada question, one must be familiar with Mexican-American

cuisine and its hybridized form, popular restaurants like U.S. based Mexican-chain ‘El Torito.’ Lara is unfamiliar with both and thus is unable to “get” why the White Sock’s request would be construed as absurd. Furthermore, the moment of shared intimacy between Serros and Lara is disengaged as a result of this cultural difference. It takes too long for Serros to explain and by the time she is able to describe it, Lara has moved on. It is an example of cultural miss-matches that come to represent most of Serros time in Mexico.

Role Model Rule Number 7

What, then, of the Chicana Role Model? Where does Michele Serros “belong” after a series of estrangements? She had arrived to Mexico with an expectation, not to find herself, but embrace the language, culture, and its people. Instead, Serros constantly bumps up against labels and ways of being that she is expected to understand—Mexicana, Mexican-American, Chicana and American. It is in Taxco that Serros is perpetually marked foreign. And it is at this point she has determined that Mexico, at least the White Socks version of it, was not going to provide the immersion she longed for. Instead she *longs* for reminders of her Southern California home. And it is as she is sitting on the patio that she finds some resolve: “A familiar jingle *en inglés* hit me hard. Oh, that little jingle brought back so many memories so much nostalgia, and so many thoughts of *home*.... I realized if I wanted to get over being homesick, I would have to travel to Cuernavaca” (108). The sound of the jingle instantly transports Serros to the familiarity of home. While it does not overcome the longing, it did open up the possibility of a fulfilling action that would temper the nostalgia. If “home” (Oxnard) is where Serros is able to make peace with her often-conflicting identities, then Cuernavaca’s IHOP (International House of Pancakes) restaurant becomes its Mexican proxy.

Serros gets up early and travels alone to Cuernavaca. As she Religiously follows signs, she describes the feeling of getting closer to her destination. Till:

I took a seat at the Formica counter and looked around. Oh, just the interior design, from the color schemes on the walls to the textured vinyl on the stools, took me back home to, dare I say it, ‘el otro lado.’ The aroma from the kitchen, even the piped in Muzak, made me think of all the Saturday mornings, the weekend I spend surrounded by—double-dare me to say it—*Mexican-American* memories (110)

The aesthetic design and smell of IHOP takes her home. Before even arriving to the restaurant, there is a trust in the familiarity she will find. The IHOP experience takes over her senses, she seems to labor over the details, as they are all significant to the establishment of space. Serros is aware of the incongruous image of a “Chicana” at an IHOP in Mexico. Yet, such is her excitement that she not only goes there but also utters what is considered taboo within Chicano culture. She incorporates the immigrant expression, “el otro lado” to express the mournful longing to return. Knowing that a line has already been crossed, Serros goes on to taunt the reader into making her confess that her Mexican-American/Chicana identity is tied to Saturday morning IHOP visits.

The waitress comes over to Serros, and asks if she is ready to order. “Of course I was ready. I had been ready all week and I knew exactly what my heart and appetite had been aching for.... “Yes,” I told her. “I’ll have—I mean, quiero un Rooty Tooty Fresh ‘n Fruity” (110). It is in the Rooty Tooty Fresh ‘n Fruity breakfast that Michelle Serros is able to address the nostalgia and feeling of otherness that has bothered her since arriving. It is in Mexico where she has constantly had to address her foreignness in relation to whiteness, Mexicanness, and even as a

Chicana. The consumption of the meal and its relation to home provide spiritual and literal sustenance. For Serros it would appear that home and identity is neither Mexican nor American but housed in a third-space where the Rooty Tooty Fresh 'n Fruity breakfast becomes an unorthodox tool of resistance.

Throughout this chapter I have highlighted the various ways in which the subjects of analysis have been unable to access an identity abroad. In these instances, identity markers become tools that narrowly define subjects. Thus, the figures in this chapter are burdened and pressured to meet an unattainable way of being. There is the “almost-but-not-quite” descriptor traced throughout the women’s travels that they cannot shake. The sounds of a fatherland that sound familiar but cannot never quite be reproduced. The attempt is not to do away with identity categories, but rather imagine a version that allows for their varied representations to coexist. It is an invitation to join Michele Serros for breakfast at IHOP.

Chapter 2

Displacement: Haunting, Memory, and Resistance in Latino/a Los Angeles

Every day at dusk / as Grandma watered geraniums / the shadow of the freeway lengthened.
Lorna Dee Cervantes, "Beneath the Shadow of the Freeway"

In February 2014, G. H. Palmer Associates went before the board of the Los Angeles Department of City Planning to constructing a pedestrian walkway. The proposal described plans to erect a bridge between two upscale apartment buildings on Temple St. in downtown Los Angeles. Adjacent to the 110 Freeway the bridge would bypass a homeless encampment. For developer Geoffrey Palmer, the walkway would secure residents from the threat of violence at the hands of transients below. Homeless advocates responded with sharp criticism, stating that the bridge demonized the poor and was yet another negative result of gentrification in the city. Both the Department of City Planning and the Central Area Planning Commission rejected Palmer's proposal. It was only after intense backing by councilmember José Huizar was the decision overturned by the Los Angeles City Council on May 16, 2014.

Throughout the bridge controversy, Palmer contended that the threat of violence was the overarching concern. The proposal included statistics of allegedly 651 crimes within a mile of the site over the span of a year, while city planners rebutted those claims with findings that brought that number down to 24 within a fifth of a mile (Zahniser). Fear, or rather the threat of what might happen, marked the rhetoric of the proposal. The company's filing went so far as to create scenarios of residents walking the street, attracting attention, and risking assault by individuals who could retreat under the freeway. In this image, fear operates and circulates through invisibility. The homeless population lurks beside an unsuspecting victim while hidden and protected under the shadow of the freeway. Interestingly, where invisibility is read as providing transients the opportunity to attack, G.H. Palmer Associates also uses it to render them

visually out of sight. Vice president of the Downtown Center Business Improvement District, Hal Bastian, came to the walkways defense stating, “the bridge is essential while the area is going through its transition” (Zahniser). Bastian’s comment figures downtown Los Angeles as a city in transit. The bridge symbolizes a movement away from a poverty-stricken past and toward what is assumed to be an orderly and prosperous future.

To get to this new and improved urban imaginary, transients are stripped of welfare and security rights. Seen as expendable second-class citizens, rights are denied by local and state authorities. These subjects are geographically erased and denied of a history or sense of community in any traditional, legible form. This systematic and state sponsored forgetting is not new to either the city of Los Angeles or the United States. Rather, this instance recalls a history of forgetting directed at vulnerable communities. In this chapter I turn to Los Angeles communities at risk of erasure to read the act of remembering as resistance. I see memory as active and engaged as it traverses space and time, troubling our feelings of the present and our relations to one another. Specifically I look at Latino Los Angeles through Helena María Viramontes’ novel *Their Dogs Came with Them*, selections from Marisela Norte’s *Peeping Tom Tom Girl*, and the art of Sandra de la Loza to assess the affective parameters of collective memory in the formation and persistence of community. Collectively, their work responds to the threat erasure by the nation-state, thereby providing models of resistance and revisionary history.

How does one remember what history has already forgotten? To address this question, I turn to work on archive by Ann Cvetkovich and haunting by Avery Gordon. Cvetkovich’s “archive of feelings” takes account of the often-unspeakable trauma tied to urban spaces. The work I take up creates an archive that is felt in the architecture, signs, street corners, and bus lines throughout the city. For the historically disenfranchised, history is recognized as much by

what is present as by what and who are missing. To this end, Avery Gordon's analysis on haunting evokes the protagonists' affective response in many of these pieces. It is something that *feels* not quite right like gut instincts, a familiar look that informs or rather "haunts" memory into existence. The end result is not to add to existing history but to read (all) history as a memory project that travels and changes according to place of origin and destination. Where the previous chapter discussed Latinas negotiation of identity abroad, this chapter considers their treatment within the U.S. as subject to similar types of indeterminacy and negation at national and local scales.

Earthquakes and Earthmovers

Helena María Viramontes' *Their Dogs Came with Them* follows four Mexican Americans in East Los Angeles—Ermila, Tranquilina, Ana, and Antonia/Turtle—whose lives unknowingly intertwine and disrupt one another to culminate in a violent and deadly finale. Set between 1960-1970, the majority of the action takes place in or around First Street as it is entering a period of transformation with the inception of the 710 Freeway, as well as a forced quarantine and imposed curfew by the state against rabies-infected dogs. As a result of these structural and policed boundaries, the land is segregated from a greater Los Angeles County while complicating notions of community and continuity for its residents. As much as the characters in *Their Dogs Came with Them* share a common space, their own personal hardships are always in tension with the ability to connect to one another and thus mire attempts at creating a collective consciousness. The novel, while primarily rehistoricizing a neighborhood in East Los Angeles, illustrates the struggle to retain collective history against individual drive to survive on a daily basis.

While self-preservation is set against community formation, the two are not mutually exclusive. For First Street residents, the inability to belong is informed by the threat of displacement, and state-surveillance. The ongoing changes reframe residents' conceptualization of their "cognitive map" of the city to produce anxiety and unfamiliarity.¹ Fredric Jameson writes, "The alienated city is above all a space in which people are unable to map (in their minds) either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves" (51). As residents are unable to map themselves onto the geographic terrain, they are simultaneously unable to recognize the community they are a part of. In *Their Dogs Came with Them*, East Los Angeles exists in relation to who has left, and who remains to remember (or map) the departed. Thus, the self, the community, and the city are sustained in the act of remembering.

Under threat of communal erasure, memory serves as a means of political contestation. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs explains that "individual memory is nevertheless a part or an aspect of group memory, since each impression and each fact, even if it apparently concerns a particular person exclusively, leaves a lasting memory only to the extent that one has thought it over—to the extent that it is connected to the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu" (53). For Halbwachs memory is social in that it links individuals to a range of traditions, customs, times, and places. The legibility of individual or communal memory is the result of lived experiences shared by other members of the same society, thus marking a shared past and alleviating the alienation of a changing city. As analyzed below, memory is active in the way it

¹ Urban planner Kevin Lynch coined the phrase "cognitive mapping" to describe individual's internalized map of the city. Fredric Jameson builds on this work in to consider an individual's position on the local, national, and global scale. Jonathan Flatley goes on to introduce the role affect plays in constructing a cognitive map.

circulates and haunts First Street. Furthermore, for those who acknowledge its presence, it can form as a survival tactic that sustains individuals and community.

Memory and Loss

Their Dogs Came with Them opens with a young Ermila visiting her neighbor, Chavela, as she prepares for her imminent departure from First Street. The elderly woman lives on the condemned “dead” side of the community that will be bulldozed for the construction of the freeway. Observing her surroundings, Ermila notes the haphazardly created post-its that litter the home—each serving to remind Chavela of anything from where to place the blankets and pictures she is packing, to what day the trash is taken out. This state of urgency and need to recollect is a reminder that memory is fleeting and needs to be saved and documented in order to survive.

In this same introductory chapter, we see the young Ermila awaken in bed: “The springs of the mattress squeaked and the headboard bounced and the pillows spilled to the floor and then Grandfather’s thundering threat, Renata will get you! followed [sic] from the next room and she froze” (Viramontes 8). Renata Valenzuela, a local schoolgirl whose abduction plays out in the public eye, permeates their home. Renata transforms from lost girl to threat and folktale during the course of the narrative. The adults in the neighborhood call upon her at will in order to create fear and thus help discipline children.² Memory is thus not only short-lived but also insistent.

² In Renata’s haunting are traces of *La Llorona* or “Weeping Woman.” This Mexican folklore figure is said to haunt the streets looking for her lost children. For more on *La Llorona* see Domino Renee Perez.

While Chavela and Renata are minor characters in *Their Dogs Came with Them* both are heavily felt throughout the text.³ Together, they collectively haunt the narrative as present-absences that come to personify memory as that which must not and cannot easily be forgotten:

It's important to remember my name, my address, where I put my cigarillo down
Call Josie. Chavela Luz Ybarra de Cortez. SS#010-56-8336. 4356 East 1 st or
how the earthquake cracked my tierra firme, mi pais, now as far away as my
youth, a big boom-crack. The dogs and gente went crazy from having the earth
pulled out right under them... Pay attention, Chavela demanded. Because
displacement will always come down to two things: earthquakes or earthmovers
(Viramontes 7-8)

Chavela has experienced loss of homeland by earthquake and now, earthmover. The lists of things she must remember include markers of her identity: name, address, social security number, as well as the earthquake that devastated her homeland and brought her to the US. Assemblages of legal and emotional signifiers are presented as an autotopography. As art historian Jennifer González argues, “In the creation of an autotopography—which does not include all personal property but only those objects seen to signify ‘individual’ identity—the material world is called upon to present a physical map or memory, history, and belief” (Gonzalez 134).

Memory and the act of remembering is a traumatic experience but they must be acknowledged in order for Chavela to recognize herself among the rubble. In this manner, her unrelenting desire to educate Ermila anticipates the threat of erasure and thus a need for survival

³ While the focus of my analysis is on Chavela and Ermila, further analyses on Viramontes' *Their Dogs Came with Them* can be found in the work of Mary Pat Brady, Jackie T. Cuevas, Juanita Heredia, Mitchum Huehls, Alicia Muñoz, and Dale Pattinson.

tactics. With the bulldozers parked outside of her home, Chavela sees and feels a familiar loss settling into the community. “The earthquake’s rubble of wood and clay and water yielded only what was missing; shows without shoelaces, flowered curtains without windows, a baby rattle without seeds in its hollow belly, an arm without a body...” (Viramontes 7). By establishing an equally powerful parallel between bulldozer and earthquake, the construction of the freeway and the loss of land that will occur in its process produce similar effects. All that is left is an absence, an absence that resounds by the remains of things that require an “other” to function.

It is here that Chavela also marks a distinction between the objects that enable her autotopography and things that no longer have use. Unlike the belongings that she will take and continue to inform her identity, “we begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us.... The story of objects asserting themselves into things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation” (Brown 4). Our recognition of and relationship to things tells us about the power of materiality to askew (temporal, spatial, and historical) order. To acknowledge loss is a recognition of that which cannot be recovered but is also useful for considering how we create a sense of self and a sense of place. Chavela prompts Ermila, and by extension the community, to consider the outcome of the fractured whole.⁴ How do the broken survive and reassemble? What do we do with the things left behind?

In this same manner, Ermila’s unsuccessful attempt to procure a piece of wallpaper from Chavela’s now abandoned home remarks on absence, and the constant inability to memorialize objects. After entering the vacant house, Ermila goes into the bedroom closet. “The back wall

⁴ Or perhaps it is a Lacanian recognition that there is no “whole” in the first place but rather an imaginary self, the symbolic relation here being between Chavela and the nation-state (especially as rendered through the legal documents in her autotopography)

revealed a patch of brittle old wallpaper. Horses bucked the cowboys in a rodeo. Who would have thought there were cowboys in the closet?” (Viramontes 14). One of the few homes she thought she knew was suddenly intriguingly unfamiliar. Remembering Chavela’s words to never forget, Ermila “fished an ashy corner of curling wallpaper and then ripped it, cutting the horses’ hooves, leaving spurs behind, nipping the hats waved in the air by the cowboys. She crumpled the paper into a tight ball....” (Viramontes 14). The goal was not the image on the wallpaper itself, but rather that it came from Chavela’s house. As a tight ball it is even further removed from its original shape, form, and context. Yet, Ermila knows what it is, and where it came from. It is her personal memento—a keepsake object of a space and time on the brink of extinction. Returning to her home, Ermila is met at the door by her grandfather. Angry for wearing his boots and being outdoors, the “grandfather’s hand came forth like a swift strike of a sulfur match. The child made a symbolic attempt to block his slap and the fistful of Chavela’s cowboys fell” (15). Just as easily, the object is lost. The wallpaper Ermila randomly decided to memorialize, like the house, will be erased and further prove the necessity of Chavela’s request to remember.

On their last night together Chavela tells Ermila, “It doesn’t matter a little bit if you believe me or not.... Because it’s all here... pointing her toothpick finger on her chest. Everything” (Viramontes 13). The value of the lost material objects linger and take shape as sentimentality that is brought forth through memory. For the object to have meaning someone/something must recognize its functionality. It is a recognition registered on a personally lived scale. Reflecting on Chavela’s words years later, “Ermila looked into the gray traces of van exhaust to find shapes of things missing. Who was it that told her everything went up into the air but never quite disappeared? Something always remained behind, like the photograph of her parents, like the formidable mass of oil on the asphalt where the car had once been parked”

(Viramontes 295). For Ermila, like many on First Street, remains linger far after the object and people have gone. Nevertheless, they are difficult to articulate and harder to recognize. Chavela and the “dead” side of First Street are physically erased yet constantly remembered by the freeway. To acknowledge what once stood under the freeway structure is a painful and mournful process but for the people of First Street it is impossible to ignore. The past always seems to permeate the community’s present existence.

Memory and Haunting

As Chavela supplicates Ermila to remember, the community cannot forget Renata Valenzuela. A sixth-grade student from the Maravilla Projects in Los Angeles, Renata is last seen on picture day after playing with fellow classmate Ben Brady:

Renata and Ben played tetherball near the four square. Renata swirled her hip delicately to fist the tetherball and the hem of her plaid skirt slogged back and forth.... Barely five words spoken between them as she glanced at her watch and said she was late (to what, he should have asked and regretted this too) and grabbed her satchel, her ponytail swaying on the back of her white blouse. In fact, everyone remembered the blue pleated skirt, white blouse, Brillo curls because the photo was published in the front right-hand corner of the *Eastside Tribune* (Viramontes 104)

Renata is remembered on the scale of the communal and the personal (through Ben Brady). As information on her disappearance circulates, her image is widely distributed in the neighborhood. Renata remains a one-dimensional figure that is immortalized in the blue pleated skirt, white blouse, and Brillo curls. In the use of the school photograph time stands still for this sixth-grade

student. The loss of the girl in the image is a larger communal loss of safety, security, and innocence. The young child remembered in the photograph is set against the lived “messy” reality post-picture where the controlled image finally moves.

Although Ben and Renata never formally met nor interacted with each other on a daily basis, Ben experiences a sense of intimacy and familiarity that transcends the time and space of the tetherball court. Few words are spoken, as the exchange between them is brief, yet it is enough to take Renata from static image/photo to a dynamic embodied subject. The memory Ben retains of Renata is found in action—moving hips, grabbing satchel, ponytail swaying behind her. Bodily signs that linger and inform his future “interactions” with her image.⁵ Memory occupies the physical terrain of the tetherball court as much as it does the photograph, but is felt to varying degrees—Renata gets to move because of Ben’s intimate recollections of her. Renata cannot be forgotten, and her absence is magnified and memorialized to the point it becomes folktale.

Within the public imaginary, the abduction of Renata is first circulated as news story, bulletins are heard on the radio and updates are followed in the newspaper. It is something happening in the “now” and most adults are on high alert keeping an extra vigilante eye on their children. As the narrator observes, Ermila was not “allowed out of her room until her grandparents had awakened [or] until Renata’s story disappeared temporarily” (Viramontes 9). It is only after the community has some temporal distance from the story that families can settle back into familiar patterns. Yet, in this instance memory, space, and temporality combine to transform Renata into a cautionary tale.

⁵ Ben Brady suffers from physical and mental illnesses including reoccurring visions of Renata.

Temporally distanced, Renata's story reemerges to warn youth of potential ramifications of misbehaving. It is no longer a news story, and the threat is no longer abduction. This occurrence remains vivid in the present time by its ability to elicit fear. Renata embodies this fear as she moves from victim to perpetrator. The earlier threat made by Ermila's grandfather is followed up years later by her friend Lollie's mother who "cautioned against sneaking out of the house to go partying because you'll be bound to meet with Renata. Next thing you know she'll promise to take you to a dance at the Evergreen Cemetery where you'll vanish forever, and what kind of life is that for you?" (Viramontes 185). It is now Renata that is doing the abducting. Her ghostly apparitions begin with the ability to appear anytime and anywhere a child misbehaves. Yet, as time progresses and the community's youth enter adolescence, Renata occupies a space of danger outside of the home. Like her peers, she has also grown up, and lures them to their grave with the promise of teenage sociability. Renata appears, invites you to a dance, and you vanish forever; she is a figure from the past that continuously haunts the community in the present.

Renata circulates as an urban legend or *cuento* to provide a moral message about proper behavior. "Legends are stories usually told in the present about historical figures, places, or events.... Like myth, legend is transformed, and thus can occur on multiple levels to accommodate political, geographic, and linguistic shifts" (Perez *There Was a Woman* 12). *Cuentos* function similarly to Lisa Lowe's conceptualization of "gossip" in that it is open to reinterpretation while disordering categories of public and private, as well as truth.⁶ In order for Renata's story to function as cautionary tale, the community must both situate and remove it from a past time and space. That is, the story needs to be faintly recognized and familiar but must

⁶ On folklore, legend, and myth in Chicano/a-Latino/a popular culture see Rafaela G. Castro and Americo Paredes.

also be open to adaptation to new situation and scenarios. Nevertheless, through its various interpretations something is always left behind; in this case that is the trace of a specific social, historical, and communal event recalled in the retelling of Renata Valenzuela. As *cuento*, it tells the history not only of a missing girl, but also a missing member of the community who serves as a reminder of anyone's ability to go missing. The stories and experiences haunt those who have felt the loss firsthand. In the same way that the freeways serve to remind the community of missing residents so too does the folktale render Renata. Without official markers, the people only live on through memory and recollection—an unofficial history circulated among the remaining community.

Memory and Mourning

In *Their Dogs Came with Them*, Renata and Chavela exemplify the affective ties between community members, missing people, and objects left behind. This is more prominently observed in the description of vacant and dilapidated houses. The empty structures are a reminder of those who once lived in them and called them home. Once again, it is Ermila that brings attention to these places, serving as interlocutor between the community and the displaced members who are gone. Mute during much of her adolescence, she is primarily an observer who thinks through relationships without the ability to necessarily “voice” an opinion. After the disappearance of Renata and Chavela, Ermila reflects on their homes as spaces of loss and mourning. With the imminent arrival of the bulldozers for the freeway, these sites are ephemeral monuments that like their occupants will eventually disappear.

Ermila remembers her grandfather discussing a “derelict house claiming it belonged to Renata’s parents.... The neglected grass burnt to coarse pricks under the carnage of the dead

leaves heaped everywhere. The windows were draped in straggle black curtains. Tongues of paint curled from the rotted wooden door and whispered to the child of horrific grief” (Viramontes 9). The aftermath of a lost child is personified through the mistreated house. Its association with comfort and security is stripped away by Renata’s abduction. The grandfather presents the home as an example of the anguish a disobedient child can bring to a previously happy space.⁷ Ermila senses the grief of the previous tenants as it is felt through the dead grass, black curtains, curled paint and rotted wood door. Unable to recover from the pain, the house is left bleak and undone.

Ermila similarly reflects on the condition of Chavela’s abandoned house before construction of the freeway begins: “Without hinged doors, the doorframes invited games. Shattered windows had been used as targets. Chavela never would have allowed her yard weed wild, never allowed cans to be scattered by street dogs or left to crows who pecked at coffee grinds and peelings” (Viramontes 9). Chavela, like Renata, is gone and her house is a reminder of the community that seems in the midst of unraveling. With the destruction of the house looming in the near future there is a loss of control and a sense of chaos directed at the structure. The order that Chavela had over the property is lost to the neighborhood children who use her windows for target practice. Ermila knows Chavela “never would have allowed” for things to get so bad and through this acknowledgement expresses grief. The mourning that takes place in front of Renata and Chavela’s home reflects a larger sorrow at the community’s impending demise. There is hopelessness in the unkempt homes, a lack of concern for objects that are vacant and on the cusp of destruction that projects itself onto the other First Street houses.

⁷ A further allusion to Renata as cautionary tale

Where Ermila is able to take heed from Chavela's lessons to unravel some of the ties that connect her to the East Los Angeles landscape, the community-at-large is less conscious. A larger concern of *Their Dogs Came with Them* is the difficulties in collective organizing amongst a people who struggle to survive on a daily basis. For those individuals, connections to one another and their surroundings are faint. Nevertheless, these ties have a way of seeping through and manifesting itself in unexpected ways, times, and places. It is in these moments of recognition that documentation becomes a form of survival for a community whose history cannot be easily demolished or paved over. Excluded from "official" narratives of the city, their stories are inscribed by cultural artists like Helena Maria Viramontes, and (in what follows) Marisela Norte. Their work unpacks everyday encounters to draw attention to the connections and concerns between marginalized subjects, and the city that both needs and subjugates them. Like Helena Maria Viramontes, Marisela Norte elucidates stories of subjects and spaces that are often relegated to supporting roles in or omitted from the historical imagination of Los Angeles.

Norte in the City

Published in 2008, *Peeping Tom Tom Girl* is a collection of poetry by LA based poet, Marisela Norte. While largely autobiographical, Norte documents the city and people of her working class community in East Los Angeles. Drifting in and out of dream states and desires, Norte predominantly writes realism to capture the everyday lives of people she describes as "*actores sin papeles*." As previously noted, Helena Maria Viramontes' picture of Los Angeles on the brink of architectural and mobile modernization is chaotic and destructive. In the years that follow the construction of the 710-freeway, Norte's take on the city retains the remnants and effects of state sponsored violence. Yet, where Viramontes described a community uprooted

from the city and one another, Norte's LA cannot help but exhibit ties that tether people and places together (whether they like it or not). In this manner, the traces and memory that Chavela, Ermila, and Renata recall in *Their Dogs Came with Them* show themselves through Norte's imagery. Whereas Viramontes' East Los Angeles neighborhood cannot or refuses to acknowledge the communal memory that binds them, Norte's subjects are inextricably lined to one and other and the city in their everyday lives. The challenge is then to recognize and acknowledge these points of encounter in order to redefine the histories of the community and the roles of its members.

Manic Monday

Norte writes the city long after the freeways are established as iconic fixtures of the Los Angeles landscape. Even further removed from the mainstream perception of the city is the East L.A. neighborhood that serves as the background to a number of her poems. While geographically displaced from larger more recognized cultural and economic locations, its residents serve as part of the vast invisible work force that keeps "LA" functioning. The permeable yet defined borders and the bodies that traverse it create sites of tension and contradiction—a juxtaposition of objects and desires that engulf one another. Norte's poem "Angel," while setting the tone for the weekly routine of East Angelenos, explores the substandard position the residents and community maintain within a larger socio-economic network. "Monday morning/ Lunes Lunes Los Angeles/ La 98/ La FM/ La Latina/ Work week begins... Lunes Lunes Los Angeles/ Ciudad Lunatica" (Norte 51-2). Norte's proclamation of another week starts with a series of observations that mimic the emotive cries of the *cantor* or caller from the popular Latin American board game *Loteria*. Similar to *Bingo*, randomly selected

images are called out until a player's game card is complete and they shout, "Loteria!" Yet, rather than the traditional set of imagery that includes objects and people like "La Dama" (The Lady), "Las Jaras" (The Arrows), "Los Musicos" (The Musicians), and "La Estrella" (The Star), Norte calls upon other familiar icons—a radio channel, its frequency, and a woman that all in combination mark Monday morning in what she later refers to as the manic city of Los Angeles.

In "Angel" Norte depicts the city as a diverse and intimate landscape where opposites brush up against each other in an over the top and almost comical manner. These muddled contradictions are particularly evident in the disparity amongst rich and poor that plays out daily: "Homeless Man on Flower/ Remains Invisible/ Big Spender/ Ignores/ Orange Vendor/ A 24 carat Jesus/ Swings on a lonely trapeze/ In the window of/ A discount jeweler" (Norte 53). Further signs of a Monday morning include the bustling movement on the streets of the financial district in downtown Los Angeles and the interplay between the seen and unseen. Norte illustrates this with the Homeless Man on Flower Street who hasn't *become* but rather *remains* invisible to the public at large—for him little if anything has changed between this week and the last. The distinction is important as it highlights a negation of the subject beyond the scope of the poem. Furthermore, what Norte illustrates in this passage are the levels of (in) visibility that are at work in the city. In this space, well-dressed businessmen cross paths with the working-poor orange vendors ubiquitously located along street corners. Unlike the interaction with the Homeless Man, the "big spender" actively ignores or chooses not to see the poverty around him. This action is commonplace (and blind ignorance becomes second nature) when actively seeing *need* on a daily basis.

Yet, perhaps most striking in this series of images is the lone 24-carat Jesus on display at the jewelry store. In this lunatic city where signs and objects are turned on their heads, Norte

calls attention to a familiar relic with conflicting messages. In the store window the necklace swings as a lonely trapeze—part performance that calls attention to itself, and an object of desire and solitude. As a universal symbol of salvation and unification of the masses where everyone is equal is up against a version of it as high priced object that is yet to be purchased. In a city of socio-economic commingling, the 24-carat Jesus stands in for those who can and cannot afford to purchase its salvation. In its convoluted and dizzying meaning, Norte (like Viramontes) signal to the oversaturation of sights, sounds, symbols, and violence that make it difficult for people to see how they may connect to one another.

Unreal City

Norte depicts the city as contradictory in its ability to construct and unravel a sense of collectivity through cultural signifiers and socio-political apathy. Similar to the sights and sounds illustrated above, East LA is legible to its largely Latino residents through cultural codes like: “A friendly sign/ That offers/ *Buches Al Gusto* and/ *Flautas Estilo Juan Gabriel*/ (with a smile and a twist)” (Norte 54). This eating establishment, like others in the area, caters to a Spanish-speaking audience in its use of language to sell food. Here they will gladly serve you *buches* (or pig’s esophagus) cooked to your liking alongside wordplay that harkens home to many Mexicans living in the area. By incorporating a Mexican *albur* or double entendre, the locale uses the longstanding speculation over legendary singer-songwriter Juan Gabriel’s sexuality to say that their *flauta* dish can be made without *chile* and thus “with a smile and a twist.”

Tongue in cheek food play is in conversation with labor and gender as Norte places this image against an earlier stanza that describes employees at a 24-hour donut shop. “Women behind bars/ at the 24 hour/ Daddy’s Donuts/ [become] Deaf mute angels/ Throwing hand signs/

In the dark” (Norte 54). Bulletproof glass is imagined as a divider between the women and their customers making it hard to hear and decipher orders. Under the cover of darkness the employees work through the night and must resort to hand gestures in order to confirm sales. The bulletproof glass that could potentially save their lives simultaneously creates an enclosed form of surveillance that leaves them seemingly incarcerated. The women work toward economic prosperity in a socio-economic structure that has them struggling to labor under, what the image assumes are, dangerous conditions. The juxtaposition of these two stanzas offer a glimpse at a city with indefinable borders and boundaries—labor moves these seen and unseen people through all hours of the day and night, creating unapparent connections (through food and humor) and tangible disconnects (as in the bulletproof glass) in its process.

While the scenarios depicted above shed light on communal ambiguities, they also begin to address people’s tense relationship with the state. Norte expands on this idea by moving between stark images to provide a framework for a complex city that is both inviting and indifferent to its residents. Included in the theme of routine and pattern that opens “Angel” is violence and death that is just as much a part of Monday morning in Los Angeles. “Drive by shooting victim/ On Wilshire Boulevard/ Will not/ ‘...report to the unemployment office”” (Norte 51). Norte weaves a textual collage that once again touches upon the familiar to describe physical death alongside signs of social death. This figure (like many in the community) attempt to survive economic disparity, yet in this scene has lost life and with it any opportunity to reach financial and personal security. Unidentified, the figure continues noting the cyclical patterns of the city. He is a place marker to both a vacancy in the unemployment line, and corpse for the week to follow.

Norte paints a contradictory city functioning in an insular time-space, stuck in a perpetual cycle week in and week out. Within this model, movement is primarily dictated through labor, and subjects (while consistently undervalued by the state) are resoundingly unseen beyond its city limits. “Angel” never gets beyond the “mad Monday” of the workweek and in its fixed stasis leaves little space or time to remember in the way Chavela exalts in *Their Dogs Came With Them*. If we are to read Norte’s poem as a series of vignettes depicting the aftermath of the earthmovers, then the lunacy of the city and the situations that arise are symptomatic of the historical violences the people and community have endured. Nevertheless, like Ermila—Norte remembers. And through the disorder is able to trace the underlying links, connections, and history that endure between its residents, and their connections to the city. As the piece comes to a close Norte returns to the homeless man on Flower Street to reflect on these associations and her role as both observer and cultural documenter: “He remains invisible/ I give him half my sandwich/ Wrapped in a poem/ And he calls me Angel” (55). Throughout the poem, the man’s status does not change and while remaining invisible to the general public is hyper-visible to Norte. Her eyes (or rather, pen) document and recognize his existence while she provides sustenance in the form of food and art. Like the women in the donut shop, Norte is transformed into a laboring angel and her words work to articulate unacknowledged stories and experience that haunt and draw her in. Norte functions like Walter Benjamin’s “Angel of History” looking back to observe the “rubble-heap” before her as she herself is caught up in the storm of progress (Benjamin 257).

Ellas

One of Norte's most widely recognized poems, "Peeping Tom Tom Girl" opens: "I am a peeping tom tom girl/ And from my seat on the downtown bus/ I have been driven through/ Been witness to/ Invaded by/ Las vidas de ellas" (21). Norte queers the peeping tom through a self-identification and re-fashioning of the figure as a young female voyeur. In this positioning, Norte acknowledges a pleasure derived in the act of observation, yet remarks that the engagement is not sought out but instead forcefully brought upon her. She is an inactive participant that is driven through, made witness to, and invaded by "ellas." This is in contrast to the reading of the "Peeping Tom Tom Girl" by critic Michelle Habell-Pallán who sees the conflation of "peeping tom" and "tom girl" as the protagonist's empathy and identification with the women. The peeping tom girl is an inactive participant that is driven through, made witness to, and invaded by "ellas." Furthermore, Norte's lack of agency and inability to determine the bounds and boundaries of these liaisons I see as largely due to her familiarity with their stories. She cannot divorce herself from the narratives because they are a part of her everyday existence and therefore haunt her as she makes her way through the city. For as much as Norte tries to differentiate between "I" and "ellas," they are one in the same. And, as with the repetitive and contradictory nature of the city described above, the women's stories intermingle to trouble Norte and their surrounding terrain.

Before describing the women she encounters, Norte situates herself as outsider—peeping tom, or participant observer of the action surrounding her. To this extent, Norte articulates difference by inhabiting a number of youthful identities:

I've made myself up

To be the girl who sits in the back with the black mask

Over her eyes
 The high school girl
 Too anxious to experiment
 La muchachita stuffed into the pink lampshade dress
 Who listens
 As her parents argue through different neighborhoods
 Who shuts her eyes
 And tries to memorize
 The menus on the chalkboards outside

(Norte 21)

Norte names and sees herself as an adolescent in contrast to the women she observes. In this opening stanza, Norte is a peeping tom tom *girl*, the *girl* who sits in the back, the *high school girl*, *la muchachita*—innocent subjects whose young gendered agency is largely determined by adults around them. Norte obtains a sense of invisibility in this guise since these subjects are predominantly read as unable to comprehend the daily on goings of the adult world. Yet, it is also through this identification that Norte taps into a cognitive and sensory accessibility to absorb the environment around her. As a child, she sees while largely remaining unseen.

Although Norte does recognize herself as voyeur, she only really watches when inhabiting the positionality of another subject. That is, it is only after she is overcome or assumes an Other's subject position that she actively engages with the women around her. As iterated above Norte has "made myself up/ To be..." and later states, "I see the girls—Las chix/ I follow them around/ *Become them* for the afternoon" [emphasis added] (Norte 24). The shape shifting involved in these acts of becoming creates a chain of affiliation that provides Norte a nuanced

anonymity between herself, the girls, and women. It is in this context that later on a woman with gladiolas and doñas discussing lipstick comes into focus within her visual landscape. This witnessing as a girl is set in contrast to invasion of space and privacy while navigating Los Angeles as a grown woman.

Norte responds to the surrounding sensory stimulus through a multi-layered process of disassociation that moves her temporally to imagined futures or pasts as she assumes different subjects' positions. The self-visualization as a series of young girls transitions into an imagining of an ideal self by way of a man and a daydream. Norte sees a "blank man/ In a Brooks Brothers suit/ He smells of leather bound books/ Our heads turn/ It is a short ceremony/ We spend long summers back East/ Raising baby alligators" (Norte 24-5). The desire explicated in the stanza is not directed toward the man—he is but a blank signifier of what her subjectivity might be at his side. The smell of leather bound books, and high-end suit marks a cultural capital and economic prosperity that Norte then places along the Eastern coast and away from her quotidian existence in East Los Angeles.

Norte continues to relocate herself by stating, "I should be barefoot on some Italian Coast/ Steamy/ Smoldering/ A burning girl/ Redtoe nails/ A devilish laugh/ My long hair/ Dark skin/ His soul/ Tangled in mine// Suddenly, I am beautiful" (Norte 25). The male figure is an afterthought as she further removes herself from the present reality to imagine an exotic self of European desire. Norte is a femme fatale only to find "this dream/ Dies fast/ As I am pushed aside// By an angry woman/ Carrying too many packages/ And an unwanted child/ In her swollen belly// Suddenly/ I am back/ Sick/ Weak// Not half a woman/ I want out of my stupid skin/ I can't stand this stupid image/ The pink sponge rollers/ The imperfect body" (Norte 25-6). Swept away with desire, Norte's first encounter with one of the women she has spent so much

time observing is in the form of a violent reawakening to her lived reality. The daydream as her own personal escape is shattered at the touch, or rather push, of an Other's hand. As stated earlier in the poem, "las vidas de ellas" often seem to invade her daily existence. Yet, one cannot help but wonder whether it is the women or Norte who is encroaching in the life of the other. Norte's relationship to these women is as vexed and complicated as the city itself. She aligns with the female troop, yet is a despondent comrade. As much as Norte wants to see herself as other, she is linked to them—they both want out of their own skin.

(Only a) Nobody Walks in L.A.

While Norte does explore the city of Los Angeles on foot, the majority of her travel (and writing) is done on public transportation. It is from her "seat on the downtown bus" that the peeping tom girl emerges, and it is also within this space that she often breaks character. In the piece "5 Zillion Told" Norte writes: "The people I encounter are there because they have to be. They have business to take care of as well. They are, all of them, going somewhere and my only silver sliver of hope is that they (all of them) take a part of me (why not take all of me?) with them to their homes or their places of work as I do" (77). This is no longer a young girl who passively sits in the back to watch, nor is this the woman who dreams of the Italian Coast. The distance that Norte as peeping tom girl tried to create is obliterated through a self-acknowledgement that she is one in the same as her subjects. All too aware of their daily hardships, Norte instead offers the peeping tom's gaze to all of the bus passengers and concomitantly voids the space of any attempt at romanticization.⁸ Unlike the stereotypical image of an Angeleno driving aimlessly through the city, Norte and the passengers have a destination

⁸ This revisioning Marisela Norte's bus travel expands on the work of cultural critic George Lipsitz.

and a need (not *desire*) to get there. The shift from observer to participant, is coupled alongside Norte's wish for passengers to take from her as she takes from them and articulate emotional, communal, and historical bonds that materialize on the bus yet run well beyond the bus route.

The bus is a small-scale representation of the East Los Angeles community of people and their stories. As the passengers are transported along city streets, they are unexpectedly brought into contact with each other. The bus is a microcosm of the city and creates a series of intimate encounters where boundaries collapse, thereby representing Michel Foucault's concept of a heterotopia. Foucault defines heterotopias as countersites where all real spaces are juxtaposed and contested (as opposed to utopias). "In short, the connections made through a heterotopia are not determined by the heterotopia itself but by the contents a heterotopia's placement brings into play" (Dumm 40). As passengers' bodies come into contact with one another, ties emerge. And it is again Norte's gaze that traces, unravels, and complicates these connections. Her observations map people to their geographic surroundings, initiate recollections of the past, and imagines possible futures. Jennifer A. González and Michelle Habell-Pallán draw on Foucault's example of the ship as heterotopia *par excellence* to write of the bus "as a rolling piece of space; a place with many places. As it travels across the city... the population inside this space fluctuates.... Though the bus may be an unconventional place to write, Norte makes do and 'makes room' for her own writing there" (94-5). In the same manner that Viramontes' First Street residents are often bumping into each other's lives and histories. The bus, as a vehicle of spatial and temporal travel, is where Norte and her fellow bus riders are often forced to engage who they are, who they were, and who they could be.

The bus is a space that is simultaneously open and closed, a public and private domain that breaks down physical and personal boundaries till recognizable patterns emerge. Here,

“words are passed like penciled words on notebook paper back and forth....” (Norte 80). The image of peers circulating notes in a classroom is evoked to consider the intimate space of the bus and question the veracity of information provided by informants, including Norte. Our narrator, as peeping tom and scribe, is keenly aware of her inability to accurately document all that is said as well as the effects that her personal views may have on the retelling of people’s stories. Nevertheless, there is urgency in documenting the stories that appear undistinguishable from the distance of passing cars. If the residents of East Los Angeles are indeed “actores sin papels,” Norte’s documentation provides these “extras” speaking roles and a presence that runs beyond the bus route.

Where the history of East Los Angeles residents is dominated by dismissal and omission, Norte and Viramontes work responds through the counter-narratives. Because recognition is an important marker of privilege and inclusion, Norte and Viramontes chart unlikely figures that range from Chavela and Renata, to a homeless man and series of LA bus riders. Similarly, and more overtly politically, artist Sandra de la Loza remembers and reinscribes Chicana/o history onto the public imaginary through the use of monuments, mapping, and photographic documentation. In this process of documentation, Viramontes, Norte, and de la Loza establish an archive of feelings that serve to complicate longstanding official historical narratives.

De La Loza and the PRS

Born and raised in Los Angeles, California, artist-activist Sandra de la Loza dedicates her work to the “... self as site to explore colliding points” (de la Loza). She employs an intersectional framework to assess and complicate how subjectivity informs and is informed by socio-political and cultural forces. For de la Loza, the public and private are indistinguishable.

As a result, her work is invested in the exertion of power through historical omission and its effects on the self, specifically in the case of the Mexican American community in Los Angeles. This political inclination led to her participation as co-founder of “Arts in Action” (an organization dedicated to creating artistic and political dialogue) and founder of the collective “Pocho Research Society of Erased and Invisible History” (PRS).

Fronted by Sandra de la Loza, the PRS formed in 2001 around the shared interest of reclaiming and recognizing sites of important, yet forgotten Chicano/Latino history throughout the city of Los Angeles.⁹ Like Norte and Viramontes, they see “history as a battleground of the present, a location where hidden and forgotten selves hijack and disrupt the oppression of our moment” (de la Loza). The PRS acknowledges the interrelatedness of memory and history within the present moment. That is, our understanding and interaction of the present is mediated and always at tension with a past—a history—that is known to limited degrees. Thus, as I have explored throughout the chapter, to remember is an act of resistance.

The PRS’ first action, “Operation Invisible Monument” does just that by physically remembering sites in Mexican-American and Latino history through the insertion of plaques. Plaques are read as official markers that recognize sites of important social and cultural value. Historian Pierre Nora describes these sites as *lieux de mémoire* “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (7). It is in these symbolic sites that cultural and social memory is reproduced and maintained. Various scholars have also noted the implicit effects that plaques, monuments, and memorial have had on Chicano/Latino identity: “The myth of the monument in places like the Alamo may testify to bravery and heroism for Anglo Americans, but to Chicanoa/os such myths

⁹ While the majority of the PRS actions have strong ties to Los Angeles Chicano history, the historical and political ramifications of erasure is a collective Latino resistance. In de la Loza/PRS’ later work sites memorialized are overtly discussed at Los Angeles pan-Latino spaces.

function as torturous reminders of what has truly been lost. These symbols serve only as white justification for the past and present dominance of brown-skinned people” (Torres 20). The PRS’ reappropriation highlights a history of social erasure that occurs in the denial of space and omission of people. During the first week of May 2002, the PRS installed four plaques: (1) “El Otro Ellis” (2) “Tropical America” (3) “Displacement of the Displaced” and (4) “Triumph of the Tagger” to reimagine, as I will discuss below, the significance of place and rewrite stories of historical geography.

Uncomfortable Movement

The PRS is committed to political work through public awareness and takes on a variety of forms from the performative, to the use of photography, and the creation of maps and tour guides. The PRS installs the plaques during the evening and documents the various stages of the process. This includes the site prior, during, and after the plaque’s placement. It should also be noted that although the group is presented and read as a collective, the main organizer and only constant member is Sandra de la Loza. De la Loza also takes the role of spokesperson and “face” of the organization. As such part of the documentation includes photographic shots of de la Loza, dressed in a jumpsuit, with a ski mask covering all but her eyes, black converse shoes, and a drill gun. Most of the images captured show her in a defiant position, holding the drill gun parallel to her face, or pointing it at a particular site/monument.



[Figure 3. Sandra de la Loza as artist/terrorist. Photo by Sandra de la Loza/Pocho Research Society]

Such bodily expressions and postures are reminiscent of the media's portrayal of terrorists and the fear they instill upon the "American" community. As a self-described Chicana feminist, de la Loza projects an image of foreigner and outsider that threatens to contaminate American values. Speaking of Sara Ahmed's work on affective economy of fear and circulation of terrorist bodies, Jasbir Puar writes: "'The word *terrorist* sticks to some bodies as it reopens past histories of naming, just as it slides into other words.' ... Unmoored emotion such as fear

slides amid bodies, getting stuck on them: Is it the fear that is sticky, or the bodies that are already somehow signified as sticky, or both?” (Puar 185). De la Loza’s portrayal of the terrorist subject relies on the fear elicited as a threat to safety and order from within the homeland—one that is contagious and spreads.

While the majority of the photographic work documents the act of plaque installation, it is also used to capture the images of the plaque once in place. Since all but one of the plaques in “Operation Invisible Monument” were taken down between hours and weeks of their original installation, the use of the camera is a method of preserving the ephemeral art project. Furthermore, since a major aspect of historical transmission is based on recognition and inscription, the images serve as a form of documentation that make the event, and reinscription process, real.

The attempt to capture potentially short-lived moments is recounted in the PRS’ use of maps and tour guides. After the installations were complete, the PRS sent out a press release that included a map and tour guide to the newly installed monuments. These sites serve multiple purposes—they move the conception of art or exhibit outside of a formal gallery space, they interrupt the public imaginary, and highlight the rapidness at which history can potentially change and be revised. Once again noting the prompt removal of the plaques, by the time the PRS publicizes and announces a new installation most of the work is gone. As such, the documents (press release, tour guide, map, plaque) remain as a type of haunting that similar to the image of Renata in *Their Dogs Came with Them* continues to circulate among the community even after she is gone, thus representing a past that remains in the traces of drill holes and lives on through photographs.

While the commemoration of sites through the use of plaques and monuments are unofficially bestowed by the PRS, the histories that inspire the installations are based on real events. Thus, what is made part and also disseminated in the artwork is the knowledge inscribed on the plaques themselves. Gloria Anzaldúa writes: “Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. ‘Knowing’ is painful because after ‘it’ happens I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before” (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 70). With a background in Chicano Studies and Latin American Studies, Sandra de la Loza sees the telling, retelling, and documentation of the historically marginalized as an important aspect of survival and being. The PRS’ enact movement and change through recollection, and enact the echo of Marisela Norte in reading the personal as political.

Operation Invisible Monuments

La Placita Olvera in downtown Los Angeles is the first of four sites commemorated by the PRS. Entitled “El Otro Ellis/ Declared Invisible Monument #1” the piece takes its name from New York Upper Bay’s Ellis Island to place La Plaza-Olvera Street as an equally important entryway for immigrants coming to the United States. In this connection of east and west, the PRS intends to highlight the overshadowing of La Placita within US migrant history. The plaque for “El Otro Ellis” opens by ascribing the importance of La Placita to displaced Mexican populations, and later social upheavals that brought other diverse ethnic communities to the Los Angeles area. A short historical narrative follows, before turning its attention to the space’s current socio-cultural relevance. Indeed during the 1900s the Plaza saw the effects of the

Mexican Revolution in the rise of Mexican nationals, and has maintained its place as political epicenter most recently through immigration reform demonstrations.¹⁰

La Plaza Olvera is a space that “continues to be a gathering place for families and workers: a place where transplanted people gather with compatriots and share information to alleviate the difficulty of entry into a hostile culture” (de la Loza *The Pocho Research Society* 12). By reading this location as a space of communal support from state violence, Latinos practice of everyday life is transformed into political resistance. To coexist and gather with the threat of deportation or police surveillance marks the community members as agents of social change. The community creates an alternative space where cultural practices can flourish in response to exclusionary American practices.

The PRS’ second plaque, “Tropical America/ Declared Invisible Monument #2” recognized the site where the David Siqueiros mural of the same name was created and subsequently whitewashed. Siqueiros is considered one of the three great Mexican muralists of his time, and in 1932 while in Los Angeles as a political exile from Mexico, was commissioned to create a mural on the second floor of the Italian Hall on Olvera Street. The PRS plaque details Siqueiros’ decision to wait till the night before the murals unveiling to add the central and controversial image of a crucified *indigena* with descending American eagle. The image was an overt critique of American imperialism and was found too offensive for “the image of Olvera Street as docile Mexican Village” (de la Loza *The Pocho Research Society* 6). Where city officials sought to create and maintain Olvera Street as a quaint tourist attraction that idealized images of Los Angeles’ Mexican and *Californio* past, Siqueiros’ mural was a stark reminder of the United States role in the oppression and exploitation of the peoples of the Americas. Drawing

¹⁰ For in-depth historical analysis of La Plaza see William David Estrada.

on the work of art historian Shifra Goldman, William David Estrada notes that “*América Tropical* was a major departure from Siqueiros’ earlier murals... in that it represented a break from the view that “Indianism” was synonymous with “folklorism” or “folk art,” which was the basic story line on Olvera Street” (211). Subsequently, the mural was whitewashed within the year of completion.

Nevertheless, remnants of the original piece remained as the overlaying white wash eroded to show Siqueiros work underneath. Restoration of the piece commenced in the 1980s and was completed October 2012. The PRS writes: “For 70 years [Tropical America] existed under a veil, whitewashed, a symbol of an erased history that yet endures; an extant but secret Mexican and Indigenous heart for the city of Los Angeles” (de la Loza *PRS Field Guide* 6). Like the traces previously explored, the mural continued to exist even after it was physically obscured from the public eye. In its location, controversy, erasure, and restoration the mural also encompasses what and how the city chooses to remember. It is now considered an official part of LA history, an image erroneously removed and thought to encapsulate artistic censorship now passed. The PRS’ recognition of the site shows how an image and feeling from the past continues to resound into the present.

Away from Olvera St., the third plaque installed as part of “Operation Invisible Monument” was “The Displacement of the Displaced/ Declared Invisible Monument #3” Installed at Angel’s Point in Elysian Park in the city of Los Angeles, the marker overlooks what was once known as Chavez Ravine, and now houses Dodger Stadium.¹¹ Under the 1949 Fair

¹¹ Interestingly, the plaque was installed alongside an “official” marker recognizing the efforts of husband and wife, Frank Glass and Grace E. Simons, in preserving Elysian Park. Simons founded the Citizens Committee to Save Elysian Park in 1965 and together the organization saved the area from future development. Unfortunately, such a fate was not granted to the residents of Chavez Ravine.

Housing Act, Chavez Ravine was marked for slum clearance in order to create new housing projects. “Amid protests and forced removals” the neighborhood was eventually displaced (de la Loza *PRS Field Guide* 17).¹² Yet, instead of creating homes, the housing authority deeded the land to the city where it was eventually offered to Walter O’Malley and the Dodgers.¹³

The plaque remembers the uprooted working class Chavez Ravine community as well as their legacy of resistance to forced removal. “On what became known as Black Friday, May 9, 1959, the last residents were forcibly removed from their homes. The women of the Arechiga family resisted eviction; one was carried out kicking and screaming and another was sentenced to 30 days in jail (*Los Angeles Times*, 1959; Parson, 1993)” (Cuff 299). The struggle over land highlights class and racial discrimination practices that marked the community disposable. Yet, as has been the case for other PRS projects (and the chapter at large), the past continues to materialize and haunt the present. The physical markers of the neighborhood and its residents have long been removed, yet remnants of its past persist through name. In its current manifestation, Dodger Stadium is often referred to as Chavez Ravine.¹⁴ The site is both remembered and rehistoricized through a nostalgic rebranding that obfuscates much of its original historical tension. The PRS plaque removes the romanticization of the space to relay the people and violence that mark the land.

The final addition to “Operation Invisible Monument” was “Triumph of the Tagger/ Declared Monument #4” located on Spring Street in East Los Angeles. For the PRS, taggers are

¹² This moment of displacement sets the stage for the type of urban renewal projects that would later unravel the community of First Street as represented in the first half of this chapter.

¹³ See Cary S. Henderson.

¹⁴ See Chicano theater troupe Culture Clash’s play and audio recording *Chavez Ravine*.

an “invisible army... transforming blank concrete walls into canvases filled with an explosive language, of hard-edged urban forms, radiating color, and an abstract, coded lexicon” (de la Loza *PRS Field Guide* 8). The title “Triumph of the Tagger” is then read as the ability for an individual to enter public space and claim it, if only momentarily, through inscription. The blank concrete walls are an extension of authority and law, while the colorful language responds in defiance. “[P]articular forms of graffiti serve not only as a symbol of or representation of resistance, but as alternative channels of communication which organize collective responses to authority and promote new understandings of it” (Ferrell 73). As the graffiti is in conversation with the state, it also speaks to the community around it—it enacts recognition of the artist and the legibility of the work itself. Yet, for the artist recognition is limited since part of the enigma of graffiti artists is their ability to remain invisible while producing highly visible texts.

It should be added that this is the only one of the four PRS plaques that omits “invisible” the subtitle, thereby stressing the interplay between graffiti’s high visibility by artists who must remain invisible. Furthermore, “Triumph of the Tagger” specifically acknowledges the feats of Los Angeles graffiti artist, Chaka. In the late 1980s, Chaka caused over \$50,000 in damages throughout Southern California before getting arrested and prosecuted in 1991. Chaka’s notoriety was compounded by his disregard for the law—while being arrested he proclaimed, “I am the famous Chaka!” and violated probation by marking a courthouse elevator on a visit to his probation officer (Fiore). Chaka went from being a successful graffiti artist by remaining faceless to infamy by becoming the face of Southern California graffiti. As Chaka repeatedly wrote himself onto public space, his name became its own type of colorful, living, and moving monument. Ubiquitously scrawled along city streets, “Chaka” became a symbol of rebellion and

urban youth culture.¹⁵ While the majority, if not all of his inscriptions are gone, Chaka remains a legendary figure of LA's urban.

Each of the works presented in "Operation Invisible Monument" relay the difficulties in situating, maintaining, and remembering communities at risk of erasure. Interestingly, de la Loza's work is also threatened as the installation of the plaques is followed by their "official" removal. Running the risk of a doubled-forgetting, the use of photographs, maps, and tour guides enact the construction of an alternative archive that highlights work of scholars J. Hallberstam and Ann Cvetkovich.¹⁶ De la Loza/the PRS' performance pieces are archives that speak of trauma and emotion. As such, dialogue is also made possible and a continual transformation of personal, public and collective histories.

In the Pocho Research Society's historical revision of Los Angeles, the Latino community is recognized as active agents in the conception and production of cultural space. The role that memory and remembering play in the establishment of these sites is especially important as it relates to power and representation within larger social and political spheres. While redefining the contours of American history, the work of the Pocho Research Society, like that of Viramontes and Norte, illuminates the instability of official narratives while acknowledging the changing nature of national and cultural representation as it relates to land.

¹⁵ Chaka's "branding" as anti-establishment crossed multiple youth subcultures. The 1991 music video "Smells like Teen Spirit" by influential grunge band Nirvana includes Chaka's name scrawled on the drumhead.

¹⁶ See J. Hallberstam and Ann Cvetkovich

What is being remembered?

In the works listed above, the city of Los Angeles is troubled by the memory of pasts that are thought officially forgotten. The act of remembering is, thus, placed on subjects open to the lessons of such hauntings. While Maurice Halbwachs reminds us that no memory is an individualized experience but rather connected to a larger community, Pierre Nora focuses on the individualized psychology of remembering to ask, “What is being remembered?” (16). For Viramontes, Norte, and de la Loza what is remembered is not truth but rather a series of truths that create networks of affiliation to those who see themselves in them. In this manner popular memory exposes history’s instability by exposing its gaps and mapping erasure. Feminist historian Emma Perez invokes this sentiment, writing: “Memory as history is often the motive for revolution, for transformation, whether the transformation is of society and its collective memory or of the damaged individual who is part of some collective” (105). The women in this study remember what is no longer there or on the brink of collapse to address historical fissure and create change through communal perseverance.

Herein lies another aspect of their use of memory given how, for Helena Maria Viramontes, Marisela Norte, and Sandra de la Loza, the city is haunted. To traverse the city and notice what is and is not there produces an affective response. It is in the circulation of desire, sadness, contempt, or joy that subjects recognize connections to one another or trace familiar stories. Avery Gordon charts the characteristics of haunting to note that (1) ghosts import “a charged strangeness into the place or sphere it is haunting” (2) “the ghost is primarily a symptom of what is missing” and (3) “the ghost is alive so to speak. We are in relation to it and it has designs on us...” (Gordon 63-4). Los Angeles is a city marked by change and transformation of the geographic landscape and the people who reside in it. Such upheaval under the guise of

modernity produce sociocultural remnant that Viramontes, Norte, and de la Loza cannot shake. The women write not only of the trauma that creates communal discord (such as urban renewal projects, state violence and erasure) but also of establishing connections (storytelling, music, and shared history). By acknowledging these hauntings, Viramontes, Norte, and de la Loza's work represent the hopes for Latina/o collective memory and historical sustainability in the City of Angels. Whereas the women in this chapter labor to make space for Latina/os in the past, the figures in the next section desire to travel across the U.S. in order to break from past habits, partners, and selves and thereby rewrite a different future.

Chapter 3

False Starts: Stalls, Breakdowns, and Roadkill

Well she was an American girl, raised on promises. She couldn't help thinking that there was a little more to life somewhere else. After all it was a great big world with lots of places to run to.

Tom Petty, "American Girl"

She stood out alone out on the balcony. Yeah, she could hear the cars roll by out on the 101 like waves crashing on the beach.... Oh yeah. All right. Take it easy, baby. Make it last all-night. She was, a Mexican-American girl.

Lysa Flores, "Mexican-American Girl"

I'd like to do a song of great social and political import. It goes like this "Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz? My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends"

Janis Joplin, "Mercedes Benz"

In "Bureaucrats," an essay from the 1976 collection *The White Album*, Joan Didion reflects on the introduction of the diamond or carpool lane to Southern California's Santa Monica Freeway. She comments on the cultural significance of automobility not only in Los Angeles but also within the American imagination at large. "Actual participation requires a total surrender, a concentration so intense as to seem a kind of narcosis, a rapture-of-the-freeway. The mind goes clean. The rhythm takes over. A distortion of time occurs, the same distortion that characterizes the instant before a crash" (83). For Didion, there is a distinction between the act of driving and actual participation in the driving experience—a thrill described in the ever-present risk of collision. While most anyone can technically conduct a vehicle, actual immersion in the experience involves a letting go and a trust in survival instincts necessary to stay alive.

As Didion describes, driving on the freeway there is a slippage in time where every moment feels nearing destruction. The instinct is then a spontaneous natural ability to merge driver, vehicle, and road together in synchronous harmony. It is an inward response to the stimuli of the outside world that is manifested through the control of the vehicle. Through the illusion of control is a fulfillment of desire that moves the driver from a state of physical mobility to

spiritual awakening. The result is a discovery of self and command of terrain that I read as emblem of American national identity since its inception.

Rightfully, Deborah Paes de Barros highlights:

The literature of the road is one of the most pre-eminent American literary tropes. From early frontier narratives to late postmodern literature, the road story has figured significantly. In a sense, to be “on the road,” is concurrent with notions of Manifest Destiny and the Puritan “errand into the wilderness”. The road is resonant within the concept of nation-building; it concerns evolution and becoming and is consequently compatible with the Enlightenment idea of progress [...]. The road story, then, is almost a manifesto of American cultural consciousness; it is the mythic representation of history and ideology. (Quoted in Ganser 14)

Therefore, Didion’s “total surrender” is predicated not only in a trust of self but also of the nation that marks her good mobile citizen within a larger historical and literary tradition. She gets lost in the familiarity of (auto) mobility and its sense of freedom. The experience of travel promises a transformation of self that Didion hopes to discover. Yet, this universal subject or mobile citizen is bound in ideological and political strife. After all, as several road scholars have noted, the road has always been subject to uneven power relations in a system that is both ideologically open, yet, is historically closed to many.¹

What then does the road—as an allusion to American mobility—mean to raced, gendered, and sexualized subjects? More specifically, how do Latina writers reconceptualize the

¹ American road scholars- including Ronald Primeau, Kate Mills, Deborah Clarke, Mary Pat Brady, and Manuel Luis Martinez- highlight some of the raced, classed, and gendered nuances of U.S. road travel.

road in the late 20th century? This chapter will consider these questions through an engagement with Achy Obejas' short story "Wrecks" from *We Came All the Way from Cuba So You Could Dress Like this?* (1994), and Erika Lopez's *Flaming Iguanas: An Illustrated All-Girl Road Novel Thing* (1997). While Latina/o literature has a rich history of travel and mobility, I put Lopez and Obejas in conversation because of their desire to participate in particularly *American* types of road journeys. That is, I read Lopez and Obejas engaging in a tenet of U.S. citizenship that incorporates freedom of movement as a fundamental right. I contend that their attempts at American mobility reaffirm the limits of disembodied or abstract citizenship. Furthermore, through their embodied mobile practices, I argue Obejas and Lopez queer the road and thus explore the possibility of alternative relations to and beyond the U.S. nation-state.

Published in 1994, Achy Obejas' "Wrecks" tells the story of an unnamed Cuban-American in Chicago who just ended her five-year relationship with partner, Sandra. Heartbroken and given to pattern and repetition, the narrator acknowledges that the only way to move on and *truly* get over Sandra is to get into a car accident. As she informs the reader, every time a relationship ends she *wrecks* her car. The short story, while detailing the protagonist's near fatal attraction to automobiles, also speaks of her history with and desire for the road. Recalling vacation trips, the narrator says "I always made us rent sports cars, no matter how inconvenient... because there's nothing like driving at night, very fast, very sure, in a car that does absolutely everything you want it to. I think it's patriotic as hell" (Obejas 18). Control, speed, and (even) inconvenience are markers of an American loyalty and support that the narrator is engaging in, albeit queerly. She is ultimately a lesbian of color and as Maria DeGuzman has highlighted, is engaging in a form of disidentification by "changing the [macho] code... inhabiting it in ways that signify quite antithetically or at least resistantly to a hetero-

normative, patriarchal system” (257). The narrator’s awareness of who traditionally travelled the road—“jaded men like Jack Kerouac” is articulated alongside her own troubled movement (Obejas 15). For Obejas, the road is cathartic, calling her, yet many times leaving her immobile.

Where Achy Obejas’ narrator longs to crash, Erika Lopez’s protagonist—Jolene “Tomato” Rodriguez—desires to traverse the U.S. even if it means inching her way on motorcycle at 15 mph. Without formally learning to ride, Tomato prompts her friend Magdalena, to form a motorcycle gang of “two Puerto Rican girls” and go cross-country (Lopez 19). As the story evolves, Tomato haphazardly learns to ride, and the women get into an argument that leaves Tomato travelling solo. Moreover, Tomato gives the trip a purpose by making San Francisco the final destination in order to visit her ailing father (whom she describes as a “rigid” professor turned sex store owner).

Daydreaming about the road trip Tomato says, “We’re gonna be so... cool, mirrors, and windows will break when we pass by... women wearing pink foam curlers in passing RVs will desire us and we’ll slowly turn to them... and mouth ‘hello’” (Lopez 1). This is in stark contrast to her anxious reimagining days before the journey is supposed to begin: “What the fuck was this myth that said you had to leave your job, your life, your tear-stained woman waving good-bye with a kitchen towel behind the screen door so you can ride all over the country with a sore ass, battling crosswinds, rain, arrogant Volvos, and minivans?” (Lopez 26). That daydream and mythic journey westward exists but has been primarily documented and recognized by a different sector of the American population (i.e. white heterosexual men). Nevertheless, Tomato hears the road calling in the same way Obejas is drawn to speed, or Joan Didion is taken over by the rhythm of the freeway. Furthermore, the road as personified in the pink foam curled women the protagonist imagine leaving behind all across the US landscape also desires them.

As I will elaborate, the road is a signifier of a type of mobile citizenship the protagonists of the text cannot fully access. Attempts to move freely require recognition by the nation-state that Obejas and Lopez cannot quite effectively assert, and instead their journeys are met with false starts, stalls, and breakdowns along the way. I begin with a brief analysis of mobility and U.S. citizenship that considers the transformative potential of Obejas' and Lopez's embodied travel. I highlight the relationship between the protagonists and material objects that signal U.S. cultural and national affiliation—the consumer aspect, if you will, to mobile practice. From there, I discuss the historical dimensions of their journeys to understand the personal and political baggage the protagonists engage with. Then I move to an analysis of the women's relationship with the road as manifested through the concept of the death drive. This is understood as depicted through vehicular collisions or accidents, as well as in the literal symbolism of roadkill in the texts. I take these instances to consideration as I explore a form of queer national belonging that emerges from their troubled journeys.

For Business or Pleasure? Mobility and U.S. Citizenship

U.S. road narratives are founded on ideals of personal freedom, liberty, and (I contend) citizenship. The abstract subject moves along the landscape erasing local boundaries while concomitantly reinforcing national borders. Movement is, thus, a romanticized liberatory practice that enables feelings, or affective attachments to a larger imagined American community. Yet, in order for the promise of personal mobility to function it must include the exclusion of subjects whose movements are obstructed or limited. Thus, at any particular moment the U.S. nation-state has enforced laws limiting mobility of those deemed less desirable subjects—this includes but is not limited to: the Page Act (1875), the Chinese Exclusion Act

(1882), Mexican Repatriation (1920s), and the internment of Japanese Americans (1942). As is seen, movement is ascribed meaning that more often than not ends up destabilizing ideas around American exceptionalism and inalienable rights based on who can and cannot move.

Furthermore, while not a formal constitutional right in the United States, an analysis of Supreme Court cases by cultural geographer Tim Cresswell shows:

[T]he idea of mobility, as a key geographical component of concepts such as liberty and citizenship, has formed a taken-for-granted backdrop to legal rulings in the United States where some judges ... have argued that mobility is a “fundamental” or “virtually unconditional” aspect of liberty and citizenship despite the lack of formal protection by the constitution. (159)

Thus, to practice mobility, is to practice citizenship. Or rather—as we know and are constantly reminded from strict immigration laws and attempts at reform—a certain type of citizenship. Discussing queer migration and citizenship, Eithne Luibhéid writes, “citizens who were not white, male, able-bodied, property-owning, and sexually reproductive faced struggles in becoming formally recognized as full, rights-bearing members of the national community” (xix). To veer or transgress from this model positions the subjects outside of the American body politic and beyond access to its guarantees.

It is this “flexible citizenship”² that also marks the ongoing labor on behalf of the nation-state to maintain and reproduce itself. In this process, it aspires to create the “ideal?” or “good” citizen while regarding racialized, sexualized, and gendered Others through what Latino Studies scholar Nicholas De Geneova refers to as “migrant illegality.” This state-sanctioned practice marks *legal* migrants *illegal* by reproducing socio-cultural boundaries that mark subjects as

² See Aihwa Ong

outsiders. Legal representation is less about law and more so about degrees or scales of recognition by the state where raced and classed subjects have historically been ineligible for full rights and protection. These subjects cannot claim or access citizenship in the same manner a legible American subject does. To be beyond this periphery is to be what Susan Koshy refers to as an “exorbitant citizen.” “Exorbitant citizens are those whose citizenship is eccentric, erratic, or irregular because they fall outside hegemonic cultural narratives of membership or are denied the rights of full citizens” (Koshy 597).³ These variants are produced and regulated by the political and economic needs of the nation-state.

Freedom of movement through automobility is but one fragment from where to observe how race, sexual orientation, and gender reflect national inequalities. As described in Jeremy Packer’s *Mobility without Mayhem*, “early driver’s manuals... underwritten by insurance institutions [made] important links between driving and citizenship... By joining concepts of good conduct and responsibility, good driving was made into not only a skill, but a moral responsibility and civic duty” (70). Within this framework, Obejas’ and Lopez’s narratives trouble the resolution of good citizen and standard conceptions of mobility by unsettling boundaries and disrupting landscapes of traditionally white male spaces. As queer Cuban and Puerto Rican subjects participating in U.S. mobile citizenship, Erika Lopez and Achy Obejas respond to regulation through a kind of DIY, or do-it-yourself, liberty. Lopez and Obejas’ lead characters travel with just enough to get them by and in process mirror an ongoing complex relation with the United States that is fraught with historical and personal baggage.

Feminist geographer Doreen Massey’s idea of power-geometry allows us to consider the political potential of Lopez and Obejas’ travels. She writes:

³ Susan Koshy’s use of the word exorbitant “invokes the connotations of wildness, extravagance, abnormality, excess, and transgression embedded in [it]” (597)

Now, I want to make one simple point here, and that is about what one might call the *power-geometry* of it all: the power-geometry of the time-space compression. For different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections. This point concerns not merely the use of who moves and who doesn't *although* that is an important element of it; it is also about the power in relation *to* the flows and the movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway-differentiated mobility: some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it. (149)

Massey not only stresses a multiplicity of times and spaces, but the way in which different people experience the same time and space distinctively based on their intersecting identities and histories. Because access to mobile practices is not equal, participation is infused with political power and transformative potential. If road narratives and travel have been understood within particular modalities of power—be they an exploration of self or nation-building exercise, than the moment at which Obejas and Lopez go on the road becomes an entry point from where boundaries are reconfigured, read “out of place” and thereby disrupting the American landscape is where the potential opening to challenge racial, sexual, and gendered inequalities emerges.

Materiality of Travel

“Wrecks” begins with the narrator declaring a need for car insurance—collision as well as liability. In order to move “freely” toward her impending accident, the protagonist needs the right protection—the right documentation—to cover damages. She images the aftermath of the

crash, waiting at the mechanics surrounded by a Coke machine, faded map, *Time* and *Popular Mechanics* magazines, waiting to be told what will and will not be covered. The objects in the shop are placeholders for the type of American consumption of the road that, for her, is stalled by collision. Furthermore, Obejas' narrator names them as markers of a broken heart as much as a damaged car. The larger concern imagined in the mechanic's waiting room is the cost of the emotional repair in the symbolic break, or crash, with her partner.

When the protagonist does finally get insured it is bought rather hastily, "I simply filled out a form I found tucked into a weekly *Chicago Reader* and sent it off with a sixty-dollar down payment to a company whose number spells I-N-S-U-R-E-D" (Obejas 23). Given a driving record that includes crashing a Dodge Valiant around a tree in south Chicago, an AMC Gremlin into a steel post, and running a Chevy van into a line of taxis, the narrator's high number of claims limits her insurance options. The mailed-in down payment to a brand-less company found in a free circulating periodical provides just enough legal protection required and a degree of anonymity to her previous violations. The hurried scene exemplifies a need to be prepared for the accident. Obejas' narrator is well aware that given the circumstances, the service and coverage by the provider will be questionable. Nevertheless, the immediate need and the reason for this exchange is the value of the material good, the physical insurance card. As is signaled in the text, the accident will undoubtedly occur, the narrator is then performing the role of responsible mobile citizen by having the documents in order before it happens.

With the insurance card finally in her back pocket, and a "cool take-out Coke between" her legs, the protagonist merges onto the I-55 with visions of driving non-stop to San Francisco. Instead, as expected, she finds her accident. Or rather, the accident finds her—a dog that made it's way onto the interstate is hit by a BMW, the narrator hits her breaks and while not actually

hitting the car still claims ownership over the animal. A police officer at the scene asks, “How come he doesn’t have a collar? I mean, I’m really sorry and everything but... *jesus*... you got any identification?” She pats her jacket for her wallet, “not finding it, finally reaches back to [her] jean pocket, pulls out [her] insurance card, and hands it to the cop” (Obejas 27). When prompted for identification, the insurance card is the only thing that is brought forth. It stands in for a variety of responses to the interpellation by the state: it provides authorities information about who she is, where she is from, her relationship to the car, and in this case by extension to the dog.

More importantly, the insurance card signals proof of coverage for her car and the other driver’s damages as well. However, for all preparedness the officer notes that she’s “still responsible for whatever damage to his car” (Obejas 27). The coverage and protection she sought out in order to travel responsibly is marked invalid. For insurance companies, “automobile accident[s are]... immanent... but ideally avoidable because the proper forms of conduct and training can be espoused, learned, and, in theory, practiced” (Packer 52). A learned identity of American being and becoming is governed by mobile citizenship. As the narrator travels, she imagines that when prompted, the insurance card will affirm identity, and security. Obejas’ protagonist goes through the proper motions but ultimately decides on a cathartic claim over a collar-less, paperless dog. “At every opportunity, the narrator not only confesses her own dysfunctionality but does so in a way that exposes the absurdist or irrational ‘functionality’ of the society around her, proliferating with cars... Coke machines... stray dogs, unwanted or discarded pets (akin to other kinds of Significant Others) soon to become road kill or the like” (DeGuzman 265). Obejas’ protagonist adopts these familiar cultural artifacts as a form of

American belonging. Yet, through the accident mark her mobile citizenship and performance as good mobile subject flawed.

In contrast, Jolene “Tomato” Rodriguez hopes that by employing a motorcycle as her form of transportation she establishes a rebellious identification. The vehicle is an expression of adventure of status for all protagonists of road narratives. This is Obejas’ protagonist appeal in renting sports cars, and in *Flaming Iguanas* the need for a motorcycle. Through the motorcycle Tomato hopes to belong to the motorcycling community and live up to its reputation of deviance. Critic Deborah Clarke describes Tomato’s decision to travel cross-country on bike as a “far more dangerous and cultural suspect form of transportation than the automobile. Women on motorcycles arouse much more suspicion and encounter much more resistance than women in cars” (134). Yet, I would argue that travelling *on* the motorcycle—the act of and movement in travel—is where she encounters the least amount of resistance.

Discussing motorcycle culture, Tomato notes that even through Harley Davidson’s are considered the best, as a girl “you can ride just about anything and its okay” (Lopez 188). For as much as the motorcycle signals defiance and danger there is a sense of camaraderie. It is when Tomato is not in motion, during stops to take a break, setup camp, or place calls to her father that her identity is questioned apart from the physical motorcycle. On the bike there is a fusion that ties the two together—creates the biker identity that is lost if she gets or falls off of it. This questioning itself has less to do with her role as biker and more so as a subject exhibiting a failed or lack of control over the vehicle.

In the opening scenes, the reader is informed that Tomato learns to ride a week before her departure date. Even after she’s traveled for some time, Tomato never really learns how to

control or properly maneuver the bike. This ever-present lack is exemplified through her motorcycle jacket:

I went out and got myself a used motorcycle jacket and started to embroider the name of my [motorcycle] gang [“Flaming Iguanas”] on the back. That was before I found out you’re supposed to embroider on something soft first, and then sew the edges of the patch on the jacket. So... I only got [as far as] the letters F-L-A-M... before I got something like carpal tunnel syndrome. (47)

As with Obejas’ narrator, it is a dysfunctionality whose excessive quality serves as critique in this instance of (failed) domesticity in Tomato’s obliviousness to proper/correct sewing techniques, as well as a splintered iteration of biker drag. Nevertheless, her participation in cross-country travel is not deterred and remains largely unquestioned until forced to stop.

Outside a repair shop after her motorcycle breaks down, Tomato asks the mechanic to look away so as not to see her wipe out. And sure enough, turning a sharp corner both her and the bike fall to the ground and the lead the mechanic to wonder, “How in the hell [did she get] her motorcycle license?” (Lopez 179). “The state-issued driver’s license...has become the basic means of authorizing and verifying not merely driving ability (as in Tomato’s case) but individual identity and—as the recent controversy over licensing undocumented immigrants shows—national belonging. [Thereby becoming] one of the most valuable ‘codes of life’” (Seiler 65). Due to either her “off the grid” biker mentality, chaotic planning or inability to properly ride, Tomato coyly states she did not know she needed one, only to tell the reader: “I lied. I knew it. I didn’t have one, but I knew it” (180). Unlike Obejas’ protagonist, Tomato enters her journey somewhat aimlessly, assuming that if she looks the part she can get by. It is about passing and having markers that identify her as a part of an in-group. And to a certain degree it works,

again—as long as she moves, she maintains anonymity as one of many American travelers heading west.

With a lack of formal identification, it is the motorcycle's tags that identify her as outsider. When the motorcycle breaks down in Virginia, a male onlooker sees the out of state tags suspiciously and wonders "if [she] had actually ridden this thing from New Jersey all by [her]self" (153). And then again while poorly setting up a tent in Oklahoma a fellow male camper ironically asks: "Is this how you put up tents in New Jersey?" (201). Reading the cross-country travel as a traditionally masculine space disrupted by this Latina subject, the men's first impression of Tomato and the bike are concern and disbelief. And yet, there she is having in fact traveled the distance. Tomato's relationship to the tags is complicated in that they serve as a form of surveillance but also a marker of pride. Always trailing behind and geographically tying her to New Jersey as where she is from and how far she has travelled.

This is something Tomato revels in when finally arriving to San Francisco. She stops by a grocery store to buy lipstick because if she "didn't have a tear-stained woman behind waving bye... [She] wanted at least to ride up to one in San Francisco" (244). In this case referring to her father's business partner, Hodie. Returning to the bike, Tomato makes a "ceremony of swinging [her] leg over the bike, past [her] out of state-tags" only to find after various attempts that the bike "really *really* won't start" (245). Once again we see an emphasis on the state tags—the swinging of the leg as to inform San Francisco that she had indeed just travelled across the U.S. Yet in the motorcycle's refusal to start, Tomato's journey brings her full circle where little has changed. The transformation promised by travel seems nowhere to be found as she symbolically takes a seat on a bus that she described as smelling "entirely of urine" (245).

And like Tomato, Obejas' narrator is also expected to return to an intended social order. When the accident with the BMW settles down and it is only her and the cops left on the ramp, she writes: "They turn their blue lights off, flick on the turn signal, and wait for me to mainstream into traffic" (28). The crash we were all waiting for comes to an anti-climactic end as the officers wait for her to return to the general pattern of the everyday. As Maria DeGuzman justly notes, "the mainstreaming will neither succeed in erasing the memory of the breakdown... nor does it ensure progress once the motor has started again. A potential traffic jam and further collision lie ahead, not swift and painless assimilation or 'getaway'" (268). Yet, DeGuzman's analysis assumes that the state expects order from Obejas' protagonist, and that the protagonist is not aware of it or does not desire further collisions. The officers' watchful eye however is never far behind as she makes her way back onto the structured grid of the interstate. Furthermore, as will be explored below, Obejas (like Lopez) operate off near fatal collisions with the U.S. landscape as a form of belonging and self-preservation.

"De un pájaro las dos alas"

The narrator of "Wrecks" and Tomato's stalled articulation of mobile citizenship highlights gendered, racialized, and socio-economic divides that wrestle against an American ideology with the belief of liberty for all. Where American travel is underscored by histories of colonialism and manifest destiny, mobility for Lopez and Obejas is further complicated in their respective Puerto Rican and Cuban ancestry. As described by Puerto Rican poet, Lola Rodríguez de Tió in her 1893 book *Mi Libro de Cuba*: "Cuba y Puerto Rico son de un pájaro las dos alas," (or, from one bird two wings) linked by struggles for independence and their later relation to the U.S. in the 1898 Treaty of Paris.

Formally ending the Spanish-American War, the treaty transferred power over Cuba and Puerto Rico from the Spanish Empire to the United States.⁴ The legacy of American imperialism manifested in this exchange lays historical groundwork for both protagonists' experience of U.S. nation-subject relations and pan-ethnic Latino identification. In Cuba, the U.S. military maintained control over the country until their independence in 1902. Yet the U.S. retained the right to intervene in Cuban affairs till the 1959 Cuban Revolution.⁵ While these moments of neocolonial contact marked emigration patterns to and from the U.S. and Cuba, post-revolution movement to the U.S. "came to be defined along the ideological fault lines between communism and capitalism" (Torres 40).⁶ The United States recognized Cuban émigrés as political refugees while Cuba saw them as traitors. This view was exacerbated by the United States' involvement in the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion that came to narrowly define Cuban subjects as either defending the homeland or turning their back to it for the U.S. The 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act furthered this division of allegiance by providing Cuban natives residing in the U.S. for more than a year after January 1, 1959 with permanent residency.⁷

⁴ The 1898 Treaty of Paris also included a transfer in power for parts of the Spanish West Indies, Guam, and the Philippines.

⁵ Mandated by the 1901 Platt Amendment, the U.S. never completely ceased interceding in Cuban affairs and currently holds jurisdiction over Cuba's Guantanamo Bay as stated in the 1903 Cuban-American Treaty that leased the land with no end date.

⁶ The first people to flee Cuba after the revolution were supporters of overthrown President Fulgencio Batista—they became known as the "Golden Exiles" because of their wealth and high social status. Cuban migration is historically narrated in "waves"—among the most significant are Operation Peter Pan (early 1960s), Freedom Flights (mid 1960s-early 1970s), and the Mariel Boatlifts (1980s).

⁷ The act was revised in 1995 to include the "wet feet, dry feet" policy. Under this amendment, Cubans found at sea were returned to Cuba while those who made it to shore were allowed to remain in the United States, thereby making them eligible for permanent residency and in turn U.S. citizenship.

Unlike Cuba, Puerto Rico's ties to the United States remains fraught in tension and domination as an unincorporated territory/colony. The Treaty of Paris provided the United States with control over land thought necessary to ensure U.S. economic and military security. In this process Puerto Ricans became U.S. nationals with no political representation. American jurist and lawmakers "notions about the 'mongrel' Puerto Rican people, and the presumed incapacity for self-government that resulted from their racial deficits, were repeated ad nauseam throughout debates over Puerto Rico's status in relation to the United States" (Thomas 6). It was not until the Foraker Act of 1900 that Puerto Rico was able to establish a civilian governing structure and in 1917 that the Jones Act formally granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship. A turn pro-independence Nationalists believed was influenced by a desire to draft Puerto Ricans into World War I. Yet, citizenship for Puerto Ricans in the mainland does not include the same civic participation, and political representation as that of citizens in the United States proper. "They were foreigners with U.S. citizenship, immigrant-citizens but not Americans. Unlike other immigrant groups... Puerto Ricans in the United States were never referred to as Puerto Rican-Americans" (Thomas 3). This complicated relationship to the United States and other Latino groups' routes to American citizenship mark the limits of political participation and pan-Latino coalition building. For Puerto Ricans, as well as Cuban-Americans, citizenship is what marks their *Latinidad* "special." Often at socio-economic odds with other Latino groups who do not share the same type of political access yet not fully embraces as American. Legal protection does not exclude them from practices of Othering by the state. It is this tenuous form of belonging and alienation that manifest in the regulated freedom of mobility practiced by Lopez and Obejas' lead characters.

The Great Escape

As a result of this vexed subject-nation relation, vehicles serve as more than a means of transportation in that they provide the protagonists with the possibility of escape. Automobility is the potential for limitless driving, the time for self-exploration, and the distance to mend heartache. The vehicles throughout the texts are mediums for potential resolution and become symbolic actors and extensions of Tomato and Obejas' lead protagonist. Jean Baudrillard notes, "From Marx to McLuhan, the same functionalist visions of machines and language: they are relays, extensions, media mediators of nature ideally destined to become the organic body of man" ("Crash" 111). Tomato's motorcycle, like Obejas' VW, act upon the subjects as much as the women seek control over and unison with the vehicles. In this process technology as mode of transportation becomes the organic body Baudrillard writes about. They become objects that Tomato and Obejas' protagonist desire. Yet, in this process the women become lusted after objects themselves.

When Obejas' narrator and Sandra meet to divide their belongings, she remarks: "Even the photo albums were simple to divide.... I was struck by how few pictures there were of *us*... [the majority were of] me, driving with that crazy look in my eyes, or leaning happily against the fender of a rented roadster" (18). While the narrative the pictures describe should be of the couple's travels, they instead reveal the protagonists' ongoing romance for the road. The *crazed* look in her eyes an affective extension of her oneness with the car. The car literally and figuratively moves her.

The sensual vehicle of the driver's actions is fundamentally different from that of the passenger's, because the driver, as part of the praxis of driving, dwells in the car, feeling the bumps on the road as contacts with her or her body not as assaults

on the tires, swaying around curves as if the shifting of his or her weight will make a difference in the car's trajectory, loosening and tightening the grip on the steering wheel as a way of interacting with other cars. (Jack Katz quoted in Thrift 47)

It is this unison that brings Obejas' protagonist and the car together as one car-driver. The photographs tell the reader not that she travelled the road with Sandra but rather that she experienced the road with the car. This is once again established in the happy lean against the roadster—it performed as required and solidifies her ability to maneuver the American landscape.

The romantic partnership between woman and machine is echoed as Lopez begins: “taking photographs of my bike like it was my new lover. Still I never gave her a name because I just don't get into naming dependable toasters and stuff. I took pictures of the bike in front of a couple of disappointing-looking post offices, and I also took pictures of it in a herd of cattle...” (186-7). The motorcycle, as a universal symbol of masculine rebellion, is marked and reimagined by queer desire. While Tomato may find mobility and automobility through the bike, it is in the machine's gendered identity that Tomato fulfills the desire for female companionship. At this point in the narrative, there is still a marked difference or gap that separates machine from lover. Yet, while it is “like” a new lover and Tomato does not name “toasters and stuff,” there is a slippage in the intimate bond by her description of the bike further on in the text.

The motorcycle enables Tomato to construct narratives of lust toward women that are projects between her and machine. It is as much about a bond between bike and rider as it is about a want of sexual gratification between bike rider and women she hopes to meet. On a Texas morning, Tomato describes feeling “crusty and beautifully wrinkled, unwashed, and

sweaty... [As she sits on the] bike's smiling face" (215) and once in San Francisco describes "ground[ing] her crotch into the seat so my labia could settle in the little groove it'd made into for itself after so many miles" (245). As the narrative and journey unfolds the machine is anthropomorphized to solidify their sexualized relationship. It is no longer "like" a lover but instead a partner that invitingly smiles as Tomato sits on its face, thereby manifesting sexual desire. The motorcycle *is* her lover and at the end of the ride, its leather seat and metal structure have changed to mold the contours of Tomato's body. The motorcycle and Tomato have become one and in process embody Donna Haraway's "cyborg identity"⁸ in the hybridization of machine and organism. Through this extension and unification, the pictures of the bike positioned against post offices and a herd of cattle represent Tomato's vexed relation to the road—both bike-rider are a part of the American landscape, at odds with the surrounding, and purposely a (technological in the case of the bike) eyesore.

Unlike the automobile, the motorcycle's role in American counter-culture is outlaw and suspect. "They are a sign of American excess; they are too fast, too flashy, too tight-knit, and too freedom loving. At the same time they are not American enough; they are unwashed, unfriendly, ungodly, undependable, and unpredictable" (Packer 112). As highlighted above, it is the outsider status that attracts Tomato to the motorcycle and is then projected from it to her own body. The motorcycle/Tomato is spectacle, commodity and sexual fetish as it travels along the landscape and into the periphery of those she passes by. A libidinal economy Tomato acknowledges and begins to resent as she realizes that is the motorcycle that is the main attraction.⁹ "Later on, I

⁸ See Donna J. Haraway.

⁹ Jean-François Lyotard's libidinal economy is a product of capitalism understood as energy that moves subjects to not only want objects but reproduce desire itself.

would find out how much girls found riding on the back of my bike sexy. It wasn't me. It was the bike, it was the ride.... And what was in it for me? Nothing could be less sexy than being responsible for someone else's life on a motorcycle that cars don't see" (Lopez 181). Tomato is able to differentiate the attraction as a momentary fling that is fulfilled in the ride itself. Once again, it is the movement—the ride—that brings about satisfaction. Once it is over so to is the illusion of sexual attraction. The women that choose to ride on the back of the bike are giving control to the driver. Their participation is a short lived exhilaration that Tomato knows has less to do with her and more to do with what the machine means. Furthermore, in this realization is also the awareness of responsibility that is in her hands. The possibility of collision and wipeouts is intensified and the escape the bike provides instead becomes a burden of responsibility.

Among the draw to particular types of vehicles (be they motorcycle or roadster) is sexual longing and fulfillment that ultimately creates anxiety for the protagonists. As Jolene Tomato Rodriguez works through an objectification by women who simply want to go for a ride, Obejas questions the void left behind from sexual exploits that should have helped her get over Sandra. On a sex-binge, Obejas' protagonist takes a lover to Montrose Harbor and they have sex in her VW:

She never went out with me again, although she did buy me a scale model VW and attached a very charming note thanking me for helping her remember how much fun it used to be to park. I've been back to Montrose Harbor numerous times since, but when I got the note I rubbed my tender muscles, climbed into my very real VW, and started doing circles around the block. (22)

The sexual exploits, meant to erase the memory of Sandra from her body and car, instead remind her of the real amorous intimacy she no longer has. For the woman she takes to Montrose Harbor

the experience is an opportunity to revisit the “fun” of parking. It is an opportunity to reminisce on the excitement that comes from the sexual encounter and the risk of getting caught. The note and gift reiterate the enjoyment of the experience that for the woman is fulfillment without emotional attachment. However, by gifting Obejas’ protagonist with a scale model VW, the encounter becomes one other thing that falls apart. The car becomes a caricature and souvenir rather than an object the protagonist is able to control and use to transcend her emotions. The lack of resolution and her need for renewal is made small as she uses the note to rub her muscles. Having emotionally wrecked herself once more, the protagonist has nothing left to do but get into her real VW and drive toward her real material collision.

Between Life and Death

The protagonists’ yearning for mobility is transposed onto the need to control their vehicles. Yet, there is a point at which speed, maneuvering, or roads betray and leave them stranded. Ultimately the machine/vehicle is uncontrollable and the driver-car relationship becomes a game of trust that Obejas’ protagonist and Tomato often end up at odds with. “This affective relationship with cars is not only about pleasure-seeking, but also feeds into our deepest fears, anxieties, and frustrations.... The very passions that feed into certain kinds of love for the car or joy of driving may equally elicit opposite feelings of hatred...” (Sheller 224). The joy in riding is the sense of control that is coupled alongside the desire to lose control. This risk of collision is as much a part of their story as drivers as it is about their American subjectivity. There is a thrill invested in their near to slight collisions that reflect their desire to live, survive, and belong. It is at this moment between collision and avoidance, the interstice of life and death that Obejas’ protagonist and Tomato are able to keep moving.

This instinct toward pleasure and death (or Eros and Thanatos) is at the heart of Sigmund Freud's concept of the death drive. A destructive energy directed at the self and others in a desire to return to an inorganic state of (non-) being. Jolene "Tomato" Rodriguez revels in the idea when stating "Freud didn't know how fucking right he was when he discovered that death wish/suicidal urge." Indeed, it is something she recognizes in herself while accepting the conflicting fear of crashing and impulse "to blaze through life" (110). Yet, Tomato's fear is less to do with the force of impact as much as the uncertainty of its results. An incomplete destruction or complete fulfillment of pleasure that would instead leave her in a state of limbo is what burdens her. Tomato articulates this apprehension as she practices pulling the motorcycle clutch:

Clutch? First, second, third, and fourth? What was everyone talking about? Many times I leaned over the railing from the third-floor landing and thought of just tossing myself over. Splat, just like that. But figured with my luck, I'd end up with some kind of horrid literary Ethan Frome lesson; end up a screaming vegetable salad, and die with old yellowing plastic dusty things in my house, instead of landing with a simple broken leg. (71)

As Tomato attempts to learn about gearshift changes for her cross-country motorcycle ride, thoughts on death and self-harm interject and take her off tangent. Blazing through life is second nature for Tomato who describes her thrill of risk while leaning over the third-floor railing. The image and familiar feeling breaks through her train of thought to detail the danger she is putting herself into on the motorcycle.

Even with a history of draw to danger, Tomato cannot imagine a resolution that would work in her favor. It is not "splat" that would mark her death or a relatively minor injury such as a "simple broken leg," but instead a tragic in-between that frightens her. She likens her perceived

luck to that of the Edith Wharton's character from the novel by the same name, Ethan Frome. In this image, the worst thing that could occur is being left to die in a vegetative state. Yet, unlike Ethan, Tomato's desire for mobility overpowers her fear of the in-between. What ultimately solidifies this decision is a large-scale vocal commitment that is hard to get out of (like the grand pronouncement to create a motorcycle gang that begins this journey). The result gives her little choice but travel with death constantly "humping" her.¹⁰

Uncertainty and inability are constantly on the periphery of Tomato's safety on the motorcycle. And yet, for as many times as Tomato wipes out, she gets back up, back on, and continues her journey. If the impulse toward death is always present and on the brink of occurring, Tomato's resolve to get up and continue moving appears to surpass that pull. Describing the theoretical tension between the death drive as creative or destructive, Esther Sánchez-Pardo brings the work of Luce Irigaray and Melanie Klein in conversation with each other to note how:

Splitting, scotomization, and mania give way to the melancholic landscapes of depression. In the remainders, in the interstices of all these ruins, the subject strives to make repairs out of love for the damaged object. The utopian images of bliss, harmony, and reunion in Irigaray intimately connect here with the melancholic longings for a peaceful state in which we as subjects may come to terms with the shadows of our troubled and most turbulent interior landscapes.

(157-8)

¹⁰ Tomato refers to an image of death always trailing behind as she drives past an Isuzu early on in her ride: "I'll crash and my life will be fucked up, while he gets back on his phone to boss people around.... All for a few minutes? 'Fuck you! You ride this goddamn thing!' was as clever as I could get with death humping me" (78).

Ultimately, the death drive that runs the risk of being understood as a circle of pure pain, Sánchez-Pardo reads as a productive exercise in love that propels subjects forward. Seeing Tomato's breakdowns within this framework produces a "narrative of progress" that is physically mapped onto the American landscape. The "splitting, scotomization, and mania" that occur during her falls make way for the eventual arrival to San Francisco and the potential for a "coming to terms" with (if not what I would describe as a "going beyond") the turbulent landscapes that surround her.

In reading Tomato's journey west through this lens, one can also understand the collisions by Obejas' protagonist as the possibility for emotional closure and personal empowerment. For Obejas' lead, there is a self-assured safety already in place that is in stark contrast to Tomato's fear of unknown death or survival. "I know exactly when the accidents will happen. I also know that short of being tossed around and bruised by the steering wheel and shoulder belt, I won't be seriously hurt" (22-3). Although she spends the majority of the short story lusting for and avoiding cars, there is also an understanding that no option other than the accident exists. The emotional and physical violence she must incur is already in place. Thus, the pull toward collision, or the drive towards death, is self-recognized as a part of her journey toward spiritual rehabilitation.

As Esther Sánchez-Pardo further contends in her analysis of Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen, "The causes of melancholic affliction in modernist cultures of the death drive, which sadistically thrive upon racial, sexual, and even class differences, determine the specificity of Cullen's represented and lived melancholia. In his endeavor to express 'the heights of depths of emotion which I feel as a Negro,' he bordered on the depths of death, loss, and dejection"

(385).¹¹ Similarly, one may consider the impact of these intersections on the protagonists of “Wrecks” and *Flaming Iguanas* as they attempt to access a vehicle and the road. Yet, while Tomato unknowingly survives, Obejas’ narrator is aware she will go unscathed. The protagonist of “Wrecks” works through her loss with the understanding it will happen again and she will survive: “I know that when I find true love again I will forget all of this misery and dive head first into it” (23). True love is not a feeling attached to a particular subject but instead a state of being with the potential for a positive outcome—one that does not consistently have to but can decidedly end in collision.

Roadkill: The Truth About Cats and Dogs

If the act of driving is understood as a skill that can be mastered, then the accident (as previously discussed) can be avoided. Thus, to have an accident is a failure on behalf of the subject to maintain or learn control. If we are to think of the accident within this context, then the protagonists’ collisions are moments in which they implicitly act on the death drive. And while the protagonists are able to graze and surpass death, other figures in their respective narratives are not so fortunate. In each of these texts, death is significantly experienced through roadkill. For Jolene “Tomato” Rodriguez, the death of a cat is what brings her to Magdalena and her eventual road trip. For Obejas’ protagonist, it is the death of a dog that gives closure to her failed relationship and desire to crash. Seeing as the protagonists are constantly on the brink of collision, how can we understand their ability to survive as it is inextricably linked to death?

¹¹ This assessment of Cullen is in conversation with W.E.B. Du Bois’ concern with racial consciousness, Sánchez-Pardo ultimately concludes: “Whether Cullen speaks from behind Du Bois’s ‘veil’ or behind his own poetic persona is not as crucial as recognizing that this doubleness in his discourse has much to do with the problematics of melancholia and its insatiable hunger for introjection (385)

Tomato's introduction to motorcycles begins by way of a Vespa that she rides along the residential streets of her neighborhood. Considering it a low-risk factor, Tomato is surprised and grief-stricken when a cat darts in front of the Vespa and dies. This remorse is only further cemented as its owner, Magdalena, drives up to the accident. Unable to tell Magdalena the truth about her dead cat, Snowball, Tomato decides to comfort her and thus begins their eventual road trip. Learning the truth during a heated argument, Magdalena "straightened her gloves, put on her helmet, got on her bike, lifted her visor, and yelled a bunch of stuff I couldn't understand. Californian stuff about being karmically tied to her cat, and that one day I'd pay" (92-3). Magdalena's curse is one of revenge and retribution. The karmic tie is one that should bring Tomato unhappiness and chaos—cat and rider are drawn together through a violent act that according to Magdalena will continue to play out.

With the time to reflect on her actions, Tomato decides that as Snowball's "killer" they were in fact tied to each other. However, Tomato refuses to believe that Snowball would cause her harm and thus decides to reimagine her not as a haunting creature or Helena María Viramontes' haunting child from Chapter 2, but instead as a prophet and guardian angel for the journey:

"Come in Snowball, come in. Give me a sign that you hear me." Outside I heard a car startup so I continued, "Okay then, I don't want you to feel hatred toward me. If you're gonna hang around, then be like my guardian angel and I will ride this motorcycle for you because I let you live through me and do the things you were never able to do as a cat, envying out opposable thumbs." (107)

Tomato admits that while she did not make it very far into the book, the inspiration for a road prophet and guardian angel came from Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle*

Maintenance (1974). In the act of anointing Snowball this position, Tomato writes herself into histories of American road culture and literature. Like Pirsig, she too will have a figure to spiritually guide her in her travels. Furthermore, in this action she makes peace with Snowball and redefines the intimacy of their relationship. In “Political Economy of Death,” Jean Baudrillard contends “Death is ultimately nothing more than a social line of demarcation separating the ‘dead’ from the ‘living,’ therefore it affects both equally” (127). As prophet/guardian angel, Snowball lives in limbo. Tomato’s reimagining of Snowball is the demarcation itself—the gap between life and death that brings Snowball back to life and provides Tomato with the spiritual determination to keep going.

To recall the last chapter, the figures of the departed keep memory alive. Where Snowball aids Tomato as an apparition from the afterlife, Obejas’ nameless dog fulfills her needs in death. After the abrupt break on the highway that does not end in collision, Obejas’ protagonist walks out of her VW and toward the actual accident. She describes the glare of police lights, the sound of small children, and the mixture of anti-freeze, water, and blood that accumulate at her feet. With heightened senses that transfix and draw her to the scene, her eyes finally meet the mangled heap under the BMW: “His huge body is torn apart, he looks like the devil.... His hair is soaked with dirt and all the liquid pouring out of the car’s engine. ‘It’s my dog,’ I lie, reaching out tentatively to the still warm paw, as open as a catcher’s mitt. ‘Well, what the hell was he doing on the highway?’ [replies an officer]” (27). In contrast to Tomato’s interaction with the cat that was dead upon impact, the lead character in “Wrecks” witnesses and feels death overcome the dog. In an emotionally charged action she reaches down to touch the dog’s warm paw. This motion is compounded with meanings as one can ask whether the touch is to provide some sense of comfort to the dying animal, to herself, or as a claim of responsibility over the situation. And,

in the description of the paw “open as a catcher’s mitt” it appears that the dog is also reaching out and holding on to her—they too have a (if only momentary) connection of understanding and support.

Beyond the connection between Obejas’ protagonist and dying dog, is also a link between the protagonist, dog, and vehicle. The dog lay mangled, torn, and spread along the road and across the BMW’s bumper. In the protagonist’s claim of the animal is the larger responsibility over its excessive remnants. As Christopher Kocela notes, “the function of these abject remnants is to serve as a point of threatening and liberating *jouissance* for characters charged with ‘going through’ a fantasy fundamental to the social order” (213). If we understand accidents as loss of control, then the protagonist willingly acknowledges failure on multiple scales including as pet owner, responsible citizen, and driver on the highway. It serves as a reminder to the protagonist as well as the nation-state (represented through the police) that social order is subject to (if only momentary) collapse. Furthermore, if the dog’s death provides Obejas’ protagonist with emotional release like Tomato and Snowball, they too are karmically and legally linked.

When a police officer at the scene turns to ask, “what the hell was he [the dog] doing on the highway?” one can turn to the link between protagonist and dog to ask how they both seem out of place. If the order of the gridded highway is meant to reflect national order then the accident perpetrated by the protagonist/dog is disorderly and out of order. Their disruption marks them flawed and undesired. Yet what causes “national” trouble is personal release for the protagonist. In death, the dog offers its own guidance in allowing Obejas’ lead character to emotionally move on. While the protagonist looked for and cheated death, the mangled dog sacrificially gives into the death drive so the protagonist can move without fear.

On Death and Belonging

In “Civilization and Its Discontents,” Freud discusses civilization within the model of the death drive: “I may now add that civilization is a process in the services of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples, and nations into one great unity of mankind” (111). The death drive, which is long seen as an internal struggle, is extended onto culture and civilization in the hope of a utopian universal belonging. Long placed at opposing ends, Eros and Thanatos are here seen more so as collaborators in building and binding networks of people. Together, the forces propel subjects forward toward what Freud sees as a larger communal way of being. Yet, when Tomato and the protagonist of “Wrecks” rebound from their breakdowns it does less to position them on the path toward national belonging and more to remind them how far beyond the body politic they actually are. As Tomato describes:

The trip was over and here I was, hardly any different... Where the fuck was I supposed to be? I never got what I was looking for or where I was looking to go. I wasn't a good blue-collared heterosexual in a trailer park. I wasn't a real Puerto Rican in the Bronx. I wasn't a good one-night-stand lesbian. I wasn't a good alcoholic artist, and I wasn't a real biker chick because I didn't want the tattoos.

(241)

The cross between before and after that held hope for transformation never occurs. It is an underwhelming result that does not come with any readily visible changes. In fact, Tomato feels more aimless and lost. She positions herself against “good” and “real” subjectivities that she does not feel able to perform. By acknowledging this break, Tomato is later able to move beyond the constriction of particular models of experience to enact differential ways of being.

In the protagonists association with the dead animals, they've not only grazed death but overcome it. While the subjects are only ever on the cusp of death, the ghostly cat and mangled dog with which they so closely identify take the protagonists beyond the nationalist road model and toward a queer space of (non) belonging. Writing on the concept of "split consciousness," Chela Sandoval notes that third world thinkers including W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Frantz Fanon, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Paula Gunn Allen, and Trinh T. Minh-ha ...see what they do as they do it from the dominant viewpoint as well as from their own, shuttling between realities, their identities reformatting out of another, third site. In this formulation, both the limits of insanity and the possibility of emancipation are born out of the same horrors of subjugation. In both cases, movement—differential movement—is recognized as fundamental to advancing survival. (84)

While Lopez and Obejas' protagonists begin with the desire to access the road as any other member of the nation-state their personal and collective histories refuse steady passage. Furthermore, it is this "going beyond" life/death that give way to queer and feminist points of departure. What Tomato and Obejas' protagonist show is not that that road is simply closed to queer women of color but rather that it is a difficult and dangerous journey to traverse. In their close calls is also the limits and possibilities of their travel.

Attempting to move with historical and personal baggage, these transgressive Latina figures question forms of belonging and recognition within American and Latino/a travel discourses. They reject the traditional forefathers of the road, question forms of cultural affiliation, and take up space because "[t]he louder you laugh and the farther apart you plant your feet, the more respect you'll get" (Lopez 112). Departing from traditional conceptions of the

American traveller and image of Latina, they exceed boundaries and create disorder in notions of belonging to consistently refigure their relation to the American landscape. More than a racialization or re-gendering of the road, Obejas and Lopez expand its political and cultural dimensions and lead us down a path toward conceptually new and generative spaces. In the next chapter, I build on this to examine travel across national borders that produce alternative ways of being and belonging in the world.

Chapter 4

Diversion: The *Brown Atlantic*

Radio, live transmission... No language, just sound, that's all we need know to synchronize love to the beat of the show. And we could dance. Dance, dance, dance, dance, dance to the radio...

Joy Division "Transmission"

When you look in the mirror do you see yourself? Do you see yourself on the TV screen? Do you see yourself in the magazine? When you see yourself does it make you scream?

X-ray Spex, "Identity"

It is Friday night at downtown Los Angeles' Grand Star Jazz Club. Inside the Chinatown neighborhood nightclub, young Angelenos clad in leather jackets, dark-rimmed glasses, and form-fitting jeans and t-shirts gather for Club Underground. Slated at the "premier Britpop, Indie, Electro Pop, Twee, Post-Punk, Soul, Sixties, and New Wave party in Los Angeles," Club Underground draws admirers of all things English. Its name and logo conjure images of the iconic London Underground transit system and comments on the subcultural nature of the British sound that thrives in Southern California. Among the reverberations of another place and time perhaps what is most striking are the bodies that sway to the music. Young Latinos overwhelmingly make up the attendees of Club Underground. There, in the dark cramped club singing along to the Clash, the Cure, and Pulp, Latinos sonically reimagine circuits of belonging that cut across culture, space, and time.

Expanding on the work of Benedict Anderson and Jennifer Terry, scholar Karen Tongson refigures the term "remote intimacies" to describe cultural experiences shared among people in different geographic sites across time. "Sometimes the resonance of these activities and of these shared popular objects is only discovered belatedly, thus recreating intimacies in the present

based on the shared remote gestures—some experienced in isolation—in the past” (93). While Tongson’s analysis brings people together across geographic and temporal terrain, the Latino crowd at the Grand Star Jazz Club reflects what intimacy looks like when time and place are dislocated from the here and now. That is, a sense of unity that moves subjects beyond their current place and *back* in time to return with what is most useful for them. It is a way to recover and recognize other ways of being and feeling.

As James Clifford, Paul Gilroy, and Mary Louise Pratt have famously remarked, culture travels. And in cultures various manifestations as music, film, books, style etc., it moves within and beyond local and national borders. It momentarily resides in the borderlands or third-spaces while shifting and changing through contact with publics. It is in this spirit of movement and mobility that I consider the possibilities that this transcultural exchange between the U.S., U.K., and Latino subjects may offer. In this manner, the turn toward the *Brown Atlantic* is inspired by late-theorist José Esteban Muñoz’s work on “Feeling Brown.” Understood as ‘belonging in difference,’ Brownness is a value through negation.... Owning the negation which is Brownness is owning an understanding of self and group as a problem in relation to a dominant order, a normative national affect. Brown feelings are the glue that coheres group identification” (445). The dominant group need not singularly be understood as the nation-state (although it is a primary figure for Muñoz), but the way *Latinidad* is still understood and portrayed in-group as well. In this manner, as I have explored throughout the dissertation, I engage with preconceived notions of *Latinidad* and its susceptibility to disruption. Thus, this chapter takes into consideration what it means to be part of a sonic community that travels across various scales of cultural affiliation and association.

Specifically, I turn my attention to the inscription and representation of alternative Latina youth cultures in the public imaginary through the work of Los Angeles-based artist Shizu Saldamando and the musical performances of Alice (Armendariz) Bag. I read Saldamando's and Bag's incorporation of multiple cultural sites as transgressing traditional models of *Latinidad*. In this ongoing process of disidentification, other forms of 'becoming' are recovered and recognized against mainstream conceptions of gendered and ethnic cultural representations. The multidirectional cultural exchange along the Atlantic is heard in Alice Bag's distorted sounds and Shizu Saldamando's representations of disaffected youth. It is a cultural exchange that moves in various directions as opposed to a more unilateral approach that assumes movement from the metropole to the periphery.

Noise Annoys: *Las Tres Marías*

September 1990 marked the opening of the first major exhibition to exclusively feature art by Chicanos. The *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985* (CARA) exhibit toured nationally as a representative of Chicano/a expression and experience. To help contextualize art grounded in cultural recognition and in response to social, economic, and political trauma, the curators began the show with a historical timeline that continued "thematically through nine different visual interpretations of the goals and struggles of *la Causa*" (Gaspar de Alba 1). Highlighted in the work of Chicano/a-Latino/a scholars including Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, Richard T. Rodríguez, and Laura E. Pérez, major themes that come to define Chicano/a-Latino/a art during this period of institutionalization includes representations of male folk heroes, family, and spirituality. The result of these

recurring images is the pervasive representation of heteronormative and patriarchal iconography that continues to dominate the field of visual culture.

In one of the earliest assessments of the CARA exhibit, cultural critic Alicia Gaspar de Alba writes about the lack of representation of Chicana artists in the show. With the exception of the “Feminist Visions” section, male artists dominated the exhibit, outnumbering women artists by almost 100. Gaspar de Alba humorously refers to the “Feminist Visions” section as the “Women’s Closet” or “W.C.” to emphasize the lack of seriousness with which women artist are taken in the exhibit. Women make up 44 of the artists represented in the show versus the 142 male artists. As she further contends, through the room’s name, size, and subject matter it implicitly declared that only women cared about feminist consciousness in the Chicano Art movement.

Moreover, its placement as the second to the last room in the exhibit, sandwiched between the traditional history of ‘Reclaiming the Past’ and the individualized future of ‘Redefining American Art,’ has the effect not only of ghettoizing the work of [the female artists]... but also of perpetuating the Chicano nationalist message that women are the cultural and biological links between yesterday and tomorrow, between tradition and change (Gaspar de Alba 129).

Individually each art piece in this section of the show speaks against patriarchal oppression and state violence. However, as a whole its depictions of motherhood represented through images of pregnancy and children “serve to reproduce the sexist ideology of el Movimiento” (Gaspar de Alba 131). Thus, to begin to address the complexity of female representation one must first step out of the *women’s closet*.

Alicia Gaspar de Alba finds the most overt break from traditional depictions of femininity in the “Urban Images” room of the exhibit. There, in the section meant to represent the everyday Chicano experience is the startling exception (startling in its involvement of the spectator) to *Chicana* ways of being in Judith F. Baca’s *Las Tres Marías* (1976). The triptych evokes a dressmaker’s mirror while incorporating images of two subversive Chicana-Latina figures. To the viewer’s left is a life-sized image of a 1970s chola, to the right a life-sized image of 1940s/1950s pachuca, and in the middle a full-length mirror. Scholars including Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Catherine S. Ramírez, and Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz have discussed the significance of Baca’s piece in subverting gender roles, and highlight alternative *Latinidades* that served as precursors to Chicana feminisms. And rightfully so—the chola stands defiantly with her hands in pocket, head-tilted back, peering at the viewer through heavily accented eyeliner and blue-green eye shadow. Meanwhile, the pachuca is also leaning back while unassumingly taking a drag from her cigarette in one hand and holding a comb in the other. The comb is a vexed object in this image, as Gaspar de Alba has noted through its allusion to a switchblade while also marking the importance of the aesthetic performance in the pachuca look. Unlike the chola’s dark sweater vest and black pants, the pachuca wears a form-fitting blue skirt with red belt, along with a white shirt, accented by a red scarf around her neck. In style and attitude the women are a force to be reckoned with.



[Figure 4. Judith F. Baca *Las Tres Mariás* (1976). Smithsonian American Art Museum]

Beyond their body language and attire, the women function as markers of difference to traditional Chicano/a-Latino/a gender roles in their matching *Loca* tattoos. Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz suggests the *Loca* tattoo on the chola's forearm and pachuca's finger "allude to each one living a 'vida loca' or gang life, and to the idea that they are 'crazy' and will not think twice about what they need to do in order to survive" (116). As the tattoo communicates outsider-status and persistence to thrive despite their 'crazy lives,' it also creates a communal bond—or remote intimacy—among women in its reinscription. I am particularly drawn to the tattoo as it traverses time to link *Locas* that survive the historical evolution from pachuca to chola. To the spectator

trained to read the triptych as a text, from left to right, this bond is arresting in Baca's anachronistic presentation from 1970s chola, to mirror, to 1940s/50s pachuca. Catherine S. Ramírez argues that

Like the Lacanian mirror stage, Baca's mirror may function as the outset of difference and alienation as it exposes lack or absence (for example, of similarity, identification, affinity, or community). Depending on whether or not she/he identifies, counteridentifies, or disidentifies with the pachuca or chola, a viewer may see herself/himself as a bridge linking the two or as a gap or wedge that mars the smooth continuum they presumably present. As a locus for (dis) identification, Baca's mirror may invite a viewer into the text or bar her/him from it. (123)

While Ramírez (like Gaspar de Alba) discusses the associations that may occur when a viewer sees himself or herself in the mirror, for the purpose of this chapter I am interested in exploring the possibilities the mirror offers in recognizing and establishing a genealogy of *Locas*. That is, an identity that travels across space and time and has already existed while not often recognized.

By placing the mirror in the middle of *Las Tres Marías*, Baca maintains a timeline that will always be out of order because of the ever-changing third María/mirror/viewer. In the ever-fluid nature of the piece, it presents a narrative of historical and gendered deviations that invite the spectators to join in and see themselves among the *Locas*. In this reading of *Las Tres Marías* I am less concerned with those who have difficulty seeing themselves in relation to these women. As has already been established, the pachuca and chola are not interested in conforming to traditional forms of being and belonging. Instead, through make-up, hair, and lots of attitude they either hail or trouble the spectator. While *Las Tres Marías* has largely been regarded as a precursor to Chicana feminism, my emphasis on the disorder of the figures alongside the

potential of the mirror highlights ongoing shifts and moves that have always already existed.

Thus, I place the chola and pachuca alongside another subset of Chicana-Latinas who troubled conceptions of gender and sexuality—punks and new wavers. That is not to argue that Chicana feminism and punk subculture are mutually exclusive, but rather that the spirit of rebellion has always already been there and to consider the rhizomatic relations that emerge when Alice Bag and Shizu Saldamando stand before the mirror.

Locas: The Alice and Shizu Stories¹

It is fitting that in 1976, as Judith F. Baca completed *Las Tres Marias*, Alicia Armendariz along with friend Patricia Morrison formed the first iteration of the band that would later be known as the Bags. In many ways, Alicia Armendariz's punk rock rebirth as front woman Alice Bag embodies the strength, style, and fortitude that defined the pachuca and the chola. Alice Bag's memoir *Violence Girl* (2011) describes the experiences that led a young Mexican-American girl from East Los Angeles to angry and volatile lead singer of The Bags. Through the course of the memoir, the reader is introduced to versions of the lead protagonist that change over time from Alicia Armendariz to Alice Bag and Violence Girl. An extension of Bag, 'Violence Girl' is pure anger, rage, and frustration—a "self" for refuge and escape that bursts open in times of grave danger. The need to recognize and name these split personalities results from a less than ideal upbringing. Bag writes about her admiration of an abusive father, and anger toward a strong mother who cannot stand up to her attacker throughout the first part of the

¹ The title of this section refers to Jaime Hernandez's *Locas* storyline of the *Love and Rockets* comic books series that he co-created with brothers, Gilbert and Mario Hernandez. The *Locas* or *Hoppers 13* stories center around two Chicana punks—Maggie and Hopey, figures I would also include in the lineage of *Locas*.

memoir. The state of helplessness she feels at home is what is reclaimed and released through music when she gets on stage to perform.

The back jacket to the memoir states “the proximity of the East L.A. barrio to Hollywood is as close as a short drive on the 101 freeway, but the cultural divide is enormous.” This is somewhat erroneous as the memoir goes to great length to discuss the community of listeners established through print culture and radio. Repeatedly, the memoir mentions magazines including *Circus*, *Creem*, and *Star Groupie*. Furthermore, longtime radio disc jockey Rodney Bingenheimer’s show “Rodney on the ROQ” was extremely influential in creating remote intimacies across the Southern California soundscape. Rather, the short drive provided Bag with an expression of self, physical community, and safety she could not find at home. At the height of the Los Angeles punk scene, there was a sense of never before felt recognition among “the island of misfit toys” (Bag 189). It is imperative to distinguish and locate the promise of punk during its formative years, for as eloquently stated by cultural scholars Michelle Habel-Pallán, Fiona I.B. Ngô, and Mimi Thi Nguyen, such seemingly democratizing movements often end up reinscribing problematic constructions of race, gender, and class. As Ngô remarks, “punks could also repeat the language of the state and the justifications of liberal capital in pathologizing poverty, immigrants, and people of color as a means to demonstrate punk outsidersness” (205). With this in mind, the excitement with which Alice Bag enters the punk community should not be construed as naiveté. Instead, it was the platform for Bag to claim agency, create space, and demand to be seen.

Almost two decades later, Japanese-Mexican-American artist Shizu Saldamando shares Bag’s experience of remote musical intimacy located and actualized in Los Angeles. Born and raised in San Francisco’s Mission District before permanently moving to Los Angeles in order to

attend college, Saldamando recalls having limited social options during her adolescence.

““Growing up in the Mission district... it was predominantly hip-hop culture,” “I dressed more like a chola.... I had baggy clothes and hoop earrings because that was the uniform in my neighborhood”” (Shatkin E12, Wong). Even as San Francisco and Los Angeles are considered major cosmopolitan cities, like Alice Bag, the journey from one area to the other afforded Saldamando with the opportunity to personally engage with a different set of youth that shared similar cultural tastes and interests. Saldamando, like Bag, also offers ways in which California has been imagined as a monolithic spatial construct without accounting for the cultural and socio-economic variants that occur from Northern to Southern California as much as from East Los Angeles to Hollywood. She goes on to describe the experience of belonging that occurred when ““I’d go to shows or house parties, and it would be all Latino kids listening to the Cure and the Smiths. In L.A., I felt normal for the first time”” (Shatkin E12). Similar to Sunania Marr Maira’s assessment of Indian American youth culture, the concerts and house parties Saldamando attended function as sites of cultural belonging, negotiation, and exploration. This is apparent in Saldamando’s desire to fit in by looking chola in San Francisco, and the feeling of musical kinship she experiences once in Los Angeles. As Maira remarks, “the ways in which the second generation contests and creates local, but also transnational cultural practices reveal how ideologies of gender, class, and nationalism surface in performances of adolescent ‘cool’ and collective nostalgia” (23).

The sense of normalcy Shizu Saldamando feels is located in a particular site (Los Angeles concerts and parties), and is tied to a specific musical subculture (Latina/o fan culture centered around British popular music). Saldamando’s role as participant-observer helps contextualize the medium for her work and the subjects she depicts. Saldamando’s artwork is a

blend of what Tomás Ybarra-Frausto terms “*rasquache* sensibility,” and punk Do-It-Yourself (DIY) aesthetics. In each of these traditions, the usually working class subject makes use of what is available to them in order to make ends meet. It is a strategy of survival and resourcefulness that for the artist means mixed media projects. Thus, much of Saldamando’s work is presented on cotton handkerchiefs, notebook paper, Pee-Chee folders, and plywood. Furthermore, her art is largely constructed through the use of colored pencils, glitter, and ballpoint pens. By incorporating material that is accessible to a diverse socio-economic audience and is widely used by younger social groups, Saldamando’s art straddles public and private spheres. That is, there is an adolescent intimacy that is recalled in the materiality of the artwork be it paper used to pass notes in class, or an excess use of glitter to make things look pretty. In her art, Saldamando calls upon these universal memories to create a collective experience.

The collective experience is an important theme in Saldamando’s work that is expressed at various scales including adolescence, subcultural affiliation, and group leisure activities. Determined to represent a collective moment, Saldamando’s paintings and drawings are inspired by photographs she takes of friends. The final product on display is thus: (1) a meditation on a live event, (2) Saldamando’s decision to document it, (3) what the camera is able to capture, and (4) Saldamando’s grand scale reproduction. The photograph is the object that bridges the event and the art piece, in itself posing as model for Saldamando. Discussing portrait-photography as a four dimensional intermingling endeavor, Roland Barthes writes, “In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art” (*Camera Lucida* 13). What Barthes highlights is the inescapable problem of capturing a “genuine” or “authentic” essence or moment. At the same time the photographer captures an image, the subject becomes a performer

that projects a specific identity—the conditions that led to that picture are ephemeral.

Saldamando is aware of these difficulties noting, “I don’t want to just take photos. That’s really quick and too easy. When you draw, you really meditate on the image and think about the person. That’s a little less exploitative to me. It’s translated through my hand and seems more special” (Wong). For as much as Saldamando’s artwork is discussed as a collaborative project between model and artist, the intimacy involved in rendering photograph to drawing (including details such as what is accented and omitted in the final product) is ultimately what Saldamando chooses to portray.

Saldamando’s personal investment and involvement in the scene is important to the artistic process. Thus, her artwork says as much about the subjects she portrays as it does about her self. In the art, her cultural intersections—Mexican, Japanese, American, and British—are legible. Overwhelmingly it is Latinas’ involvement in British fan culture that permeates the work drawn into the public eye. Furthermore, her decision to represent and inscribe women encountered in this Los Angeles social scene make her work particularly fruitful to discuss in relation to contemporary depictions of Latinas. Like Alice Bag, Shizu Saldamando contributes to a feminist archive that accounts for their significant contribution to the cultural landscape and Latina/o identity formations that are not so cut-and-dry. As Alice Bag remarks in the opening pages of her memoir, “the seeds of Violence Girl were sown way before I was even born” (8). This motion back in time alludes to historical and familial baggage as well as a disruptive self-fashioning that predates her. Thus, Bag like Saldamando harken a long lineage of *Locas* that have always existed and will continue to cause noise in the public sphere.

Masks/Masque

Late-1960s East L.A.—Alice Bag recalls a family that moves next door to her Ditman Avenue residence. The youngest in that family is about the same age as then 8-year old Alicia Armendariz. In one of their first interactions this child informs Armendariz that her father is a wrestler. An avid fan of Mexican-style *Lucha Libre*, Armendariz instantly thinks of famous wrestlers or as they are popularly referred to *luchadores* including Mil Mascaras, Blue Demon, El Santo, and El Indio. As Bag states, “*Luchadores* were more than just athletes—they were real-life superheroes with near mythic status” (49). With the exception of El Indio, a common thread in the superhero-like status of these wrestlers was their use of elaborate and colorful masks. Once a *luchador* decides to wear a mask, to be an *enmascarado*, it becomes a critical marker of the identity or persona they evoke in the ring. As Heather Levi examines, “Inside the ring, the mask is treated as a fetishized object that represents the wrestler’s honor. The masked wrestler cannot let his or her face be seen under any circumstances. This opens up a range of possibilities of play, since in *lucha libre* (especially for *rudos*) it is often as good to humiliate an opponent as to defeat him or her” (115). And it is through *Lucha Libre*’s multi-layered performances—the multiple personalities of the *rudos* (bad guys) and *técnicos* (good guys)—that Alicia Armendariz first recognizes the duality of human nature: “It was the same kind of duality that I experienced when I realized that I both love and hated my father, that a *rudo*—a villain—could also be a good guy. It was as much a part of the Mexican culture as eating sweet apple with salt or chili...” (50). Because *Lucha Libre* is as much a show as it is a sport, fights include melodramatic plots and backstories that helped frame a *luchador*’s moral compass. Through these plotlines, spectators see the complicated and un-fixed nature of *rudos* and *técnicos*. And thus it is *Lucha Libre* that provides Armendariz with the language to articulate her own vexed relationship to her father. It

is a figurative unmasking where he could be both villain and hero, and she could both love and hate him.

Late 1970s Hollywood—The Bags are set to perform their first show at the now legendary Los Angeles punk venue, the Masque. In the band's current incarnation from *Femme Fatale* to the Bags, it is co-founder Patricia Morrison who suggests wearing bags over their heads when they perform. As they prepare to go on stage Bag relays the plan to friend, Bobby Pyn (also known as Darby Crash of the Germs) who threatens to rip it off if she goes through with it. Bag writes:

Bobby's at the front of the stage... He loves me, he wants to hug me... I easily break away from his intoxicated hug and jump back on stage, continuing to screech and writhe, but Bobby is not to be deterred... With one bold tug he rips the bag open and I explode like a broken pinata [sic]. The torn bag is clinging to my head. My view of the audience now comes from a gash at the side of the bag rather than the eye holes [sic]. As I move, the audience comes in and out of my sight line. Mercifully Bobby grabs at the bag again and tears the rest of it off. I am exposed but not defeated. (212-13)

As Heather Levi further elaborates on the rules of *Lucha Libre*, an unmasked wrestler loses power. "Until the mask is returned he or she can't fight, but can only clutch his or her face and wait—either for a partner to retrieve it or to be led to the dressing room to put on a fresh one" (115). Unlike the *luchadores'* unmasking, Bag's loss of anonymity only makes her stronger. It unleashes a cathartic rage and aggression that circulates among the audience. Thus, Alice Bag's

resolution to the dueling forces that complicated her youth are resolved in the emergence of Violence Girl—a volatile self-actualization that brings people together through music.²

Although the seminal Chicana feminist text *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) would not be published for another decade, in this moment of release Alice Bag/Violence Girl embodies the *mestiza* consciousness Anzaldúa would go on to write about. For Gloria Anzaldúa “though [the *mestiza* consciousness] is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative movement that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm” (“Borderlands” 102). Pre-dating the concept, we can nevertheless see and feel the explosion that occurs on stage once the bag is ripped open. Screeching and writhing, Bag is in her prime state of being as the boundaries between stage and audience are broken down. No longer concealed, Alice Bag expresses a renewal through the music, the performance, and the self. She is exposed but not defeated. Where the figurative and literal mask Bag wore provided concealment and endurance, once it is removed, Violence Girl appears. She is (as the title of the anthology by feminists of color suggests) “making face, making soul.” “*Haciendo caras* has the added connotation of making *gestos subversivos*, political subversive gestures, the piercing look that questions or challenges, the look that says, ‘Don’t walk all over me,’ the one that says, ‘Get out of my face’” (Anzaldúa “Making Face” xv). Unmasked, Alice Bag/Violence Girl is ‘making face’ not only within a subculture that is predominantly coded white and male, but also against traditional raced and gendered standards of behavior. The attitude she exudes by dissonant sound and performance challenges the way she recognizes her self and sees the world. As Michelle Habel-Pallán describes, Alice Bag “did not reject femininity per se but rejected the equation of

² While the figure of the *luchador* is largely portrayed as male, there are a number of female *luchadoras*. Artists including Guadalupe Rodriguez, Jaime Hernandez, Alma López, and Judith Hernández have incorporated the figure of the *luchadora* into their work.

femininity with victimization and passivity” (158). The band and stage provided the outlet to express and play with this identity.

Avenging Goddess

The Bags released “Babylonian Gorgon” alongside the single “Survive” on the short-lived label Dangerhouse Records in 1979. Written by guitarist and key songwriter Craig Lee, the song is meant to capture the chaos Bag brought to the Bags as their front woman. It speaks against conformity in its confrontational appeal for authenticity. Although Alice Bag did not write the song, it is her shrill and dissonant performance that makes it all her own (like Linda Ronstadt from Chapter 1). She is, as has been remarked, violent on stage. Through sight and sound, Alice Bag resists objectification by the spectator. Reflecting on this period time she writes, “The Bags had always had a dark, angry core. It’s the reason why Brendan Mullen remarked of our first show at the Masque that he’d ‘never seen a woman so angry,’ why Craig Lee had written the songs ‘Babylonian Gorgon’ and ‘Violence Girl’ about me, why Bibbe Hansen later described my stage persona as a ‘woman as Avenging Goddess’” (308).³ It was an anger that circulated in the venue, and could not be ignored thus forcing the audience to engage it (which they eagerly did). In such a raw emotional state, anger if only momentarily, functions as a form of recognition and community building.

In the opening stanza of “Babylonian Gorgon,” Bag exclaims, “Don’t need no false reason for why I am out of place/ I don’t goose step for the masquerade/ I don’t scream and twist just for the fun of it/ I’m poisoned blood when I’m pissed.” In these lines, Bag is aware of her outsider status that marks her as different on stage, in the punk scene, and in the public eye.

³ Performance artist Bibbe Hansen was a pivotal figure in the Chicano/Latino arts scene and, along with husband Sean Carrillo, operated the Los Angeles artistic meeting space Troy Café.

While the music scene provided a sense of kinship it was also marked by homophobia, racism, and sexism. Thus, her performance (in the goose step, scream, and twist) should not be simply read as an exercise in entertainment but be taken seriously and considered dangerous. Times were changing in the Los Angeles punk scene and as Bag retells, “the autumn winds blew in a new legion of punks, some wearing armbands with swastikas. As they walked through the courtyard of the Canterbury [Hollywood apartment complex], Shannon and I learned out of our first-floor window and shouted at them: ‘*Die, Nazi Scum!*’” (290). The sounds that had brought a band of outsiders together had grown to the point that fractures and divisions could be seen. Having been there from the beginning, Bag was thus protective of her space.

Unafraid and vocal, the refrain that follows the opening lines shows Bag identifying as the Babylonian Gorgon who will “babble babble on. [She goes on to sing,] so when you’re near me don’t be fake/ It’s gonna be your last mistake.” Assuming the role of Babylonian Gorgon—an extravagant yet repulsive woman, or perhaps one of the Greek snake-haired sisters in pursuit of sensual pleasure—Bag informs the listener that she will continue to say what she wants with little regard for public approval, as will Shizu Saldamando and her artistic subjects. In her search for reflexivity within the scene she calls out fakes and poseurs. It is then little surprise that as the song comes to a close Alice Bag requests the listener “Tear down, rip up, your idols photograph,” as the democratizing promise that the punk scene once bestowed instead created a false sense of superiority among artists. In the act of tearing, and ripping their photograph they loose the star power that was never meant to be theirs to begin with. I would argue that among the pictures of idols is her (Alice Bag’s) photograph as well. Because Bag continuously questions her and others role in the punk scene she is not excluded from the critique. Given her bequest to be taken it seriously it seems odd that she closes the song with the line: “Do it all just

for a laugh” (Bags “Babylonian Gorgon”). The laugh can be read either in association with the tearing of the photographs or the performance of the song as a whole. However, in its forced and hostile iteration, Bag’s laughter is heard quite menacingly and thus underscoring the seriousness in her call to action.

We Don’t Need the English

It is in the 1979 recording of “Babylon Gorgon” that Alice Bag tells her listeners to rid themselves of idols, and it is in that same year that the band released “We Don’t Need the English” on the *Yes L.A.* compilation album. Within the larger punk narrative, New York and London have held precedence over Los Angeles, which is usually relegated to the sidelines. Yet, as Alice Bag contends “Los Angeles is one of the most diverse cities in the world, and I am proud to say that our punk scene reflected that diversity” (236). With “We Don’t Need the English,” the Bags further their case for Los Angeles and against idolization. The song opens with “We don’t need the English, telling us what we should be/ We don’t need the English, their boring songs of anarchy” (Bags “We Don’t Need”). By explicitly referring to anarchy, the Bags call out one of the most influential punk bands in the U.K., the Sex Pistols and their 1977 single “Anarchy in the U.K.” Alice Bag proceeds to disparage the English for what feels like policing of punk authenticity. As the lyrics go, the English try to dictate what “we” should be, say, and how the music should be played. The sense of ownership over the sound extends to an aesthetic look as well. Bag sounds bemused as she sings of requests to change and stop changing her hair color by a group she describes as doing nothing more than that. Even here, there is an antagonism directed toward a British punk scene that appears to be solely based on looks as opposed to music.

While there is a resistance to British origins, the U.K. did play a pivotal role in the establishment of a Los Angeles punk sound. Alice Bag repeatedly mentions the impact of English music—particularly that of Elton John and David Bowie—as formative to her musical coming of age. Furthermore, she mentions radio host Rodney Bingenheimer’s weekly program “Rodney on the ROQ” as first introducing her to the U.K. glam rock scene that would influence her style and eventual stage persona. In many ways Bingenheimer was the vehicle for English music in Los Angeles and thus comes to represent the Los Angeles punk sound. “Some punks thought that because Rodney had always been at the forefront of glitter rock, his switch to punk was somehow disingenuous, but I don’t believe that. Many of us who were part of the early L.A. punk scene transitioned into the new music. We didn’t materialize out of a vacuum without any musical roots; we weren’t born clad in leather jackets or ripped fishnet stockings” (Bag 160). While the L.A. scene did not *need* the English, they did desire to converse and play off each other in a way that Bingenheimer’s program provided.

It was also Rodney Bingenheimer who first played the Sex Pistols on Los Angeles radio. Thus, introducing youth like Alice Bag to their “boring songs of anarchy.” Through this communal musical experience coupled with stories of off-stage antics that circulated in the press, the Sex Pistols stood for English punk. It is then with great anticipation that two years prior to “We Don’t Need the English,” the Bags travel to San Francisco in order to see them play their only scheduled west coast tour date. However, “after listening to a few songs near the front of the stage, I allowed myself to drift back and ended up walking around back to the auditorium, talking to friends before the show was over, which was very unlike me” (Bag 237). It is an underwhelming experience that leaves Alice Bag desiring the distance between performer and

audience that she usually actively protests. This disillusionment is furthered days later during a Bags concert when Sex Pistols' bassist Sid Vicious showed up.



[Figure 5. The Bags at the Mabuhay with Sid Vicious rolling on the stage. Photo by Ruby Ray]

There is a picture by photographer and punk archivist Ruby Ray that depicts the interaction between the Bags and Vicious on that weekend of January 15, 1978. Skewed left, the photograph features Sid Vicious lying on the floor like a baby at play. His head and forearms levitated, as he kicks his legs up into the air. While the Bags' band members Craig Lee, Rob Ritter, and Terry Graham look toward their instruments, Alice Bag stands just beside and peers down at Vicious in what appears to be mid-bounce. Retelling the occasion, Bag writes:

I got the distinct feeling he wanted to share the microphone with me and join in the chorus of the song but I knew there was no way Sid could possibly know any of our songs so he just hung onto my neck, still smiling and swaying around the stage with me. He reached for the mic a couple of times, but I hung onto it, because as much as I liked Sid, it was a Bags show, not karaoke night (238)

Like her band mates looking down onto their instruments, Bag's stare and refusal to let go of the microphone is a claim over what belongs to her. At the same time she is able to express regard for Vicious and recognize his significance to the punk community, it does not supersede her investment in a Bags show. Violence Girl rightfully takes up space. After all, as both "We Don't Need the English" and "Babylonian Gorgon" contend, there are no idols in punk rock.

Los Cuatro

While there are no idols in punk, they are ever-present figures that must be negotiated within Chicano/a-Latino/a popular culture. Thus to be acknowledged as a Chicana-Latina artist is to bump against the question of authenticity that is often hard to locate for both Alice Bag and Shizu Saldamando. Although Mexican musician Pedro Infante, Spanish singer Rafael, and the flamboyant Elton John inspired Bag, she still had difficulty finding community within existing models of *Latinidad*. Having been too young to participate in the Chicano Moratorium, Bag describes the excitement in seeing the table for the high school student group-- Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA). "I was finally old enough to be a Chicana activist and maybe even a Brown Beret, but the people I met that day snickered and whispered conspiratorially... as I walked up to the table. Instead... they asked me why I was wearing what I was wearing. They made me feel rejected even though they didn't outwardly insult me... A long

time would pass before I would call myself Chicana again... (103). Bag experienced rejection for not following prescribed culture codes—signs and signifiers that would mark her Chicana enough for the organization. This is not to disparage the youth that snickered as she walked to the table but rather to address the need to both expand notions of *Latinidad*, as well as highlight its ongoing narrow definition. While Bag took time before comfortably calling herself Chicana (an identity she has fully claimed as seen in the title of her memoir), Shizu Saldamando negotiated her Chicana identity and “conflicting” cultural markers from the start. Saldamando troubles the Chicana-Latina identity as static by playing with its cultural signifiers and thus refashioning its meaning.

With this in mind, I return to the CARA exhibit and Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s discussion of the figures represented in its “Cultural Icons” room. “Emiliano Zapata... with the figures of the Pachuco and the late Cesar E. Chavez (*que en paz descanse*) forms what I call the *holy trinity* of Chicano popular heroes” [emphasis added on the “holy trinity”] (50). Within the Chicano Movement’s cultural and national imaginary, these three icons continue to hold a strong influence and legacy in relation to Chicano/a artists and, I would add, the larger Chicano/a-Latino/a public sphere. I place Gaspar de Alba’s “holy trinity” in conversation with Shizu Saldamando’s “The Holy *Cuatro*: Morrissey, Siouxsie, Robert Smith, Dave Ghan,” (2005) as an example of the revisionary work that can take place in Chicana/o-Latina/o identity formations. In this model, Saldamando expands who can be considered a Latina/o cultural symbol while establishing new points of reference for Chicano/a-Latino/a cultural affiliation.

Drawn on cotton handkerchiefs with ballpoint pens, Saldamando’s depiction of four dominant figures within the 1980s British New Wave, post-punk scene is reminiscent of *pañó* art—a style of art-making popularized within prisons where a lack of access to supplies makes

literal the idea of making due with what is available. Although this relationship has previously been read as implicitly casting “these musicians and their devotees alike in the role of prisoners, as if subjugated to the looking domain of mainstream culture” (Fox 85). I contend such an analysis reestablishes a hierarchical cultural model that proves ineffective to the repositioning and recognition of Saldamando, her subjects, and the subculture her projects reflect. Instead, viewing Saldamando’s relationship, or rather lack of relationship to prison culture, locates the piece away from prison and role of prisoner and into mainstream culture with agency for the subjects. The positive rendering of this work is furthered when placed in conjunction with its title, “The Holy *Cuatro*.” The combination of English and Spanish in the title recalls the linguistic play enacted by generations of Chicana/o-Latina/os in their use of the hybridized form of speech—Spanglish. Furthermore, the religious undertones implied in the use of “holy” inserts the important role that religion and spirituality plays in Chicana/o-Latina/o communities. Concomitantly, its use on unsanctified figures emphasizes their sometimes God-like reverence in the post-punk/new wave subculture. Finally, by expanding the holy trinity to the holy *cuatro* that includes Siouxsie and the Banshees lead singer Siouxsie Sioux, Saldamando reimagines a patriarchal community that is representative and inviting of its female devotees.



[Figure 6. Shizu Saldamando “The Holy *Cuatro*: Morrissey, Siouxsie, Robert Smith, Dave Ghan” (2005). Photo by Shizu Saldamando]

Illustrated on separate handkerchiefs, “The Holy *Cuatro*” was shown together in the shape of a diamond with Morrissey at the top-center of the display. He is depicted in a signature pose that includes pompadour hairstyle; head raised and cocked to the right, and eyes casually if dismissively looking down on the viewer. Former lead singer for the British band the Smiths, Morrissey arguably holds the most recognizable link to the Los Angeles’ Chicana/o-Latina/o community. Morrissey’s impact in Brown spaces has resulted in a number of cultural manifestations that include artwork, film, theater, and an annual convention that features “Mexican Morrissey” Jose Maldonado’s cover band the Sweet and Tender Hooligans. While there have been a number of attempts to decipher Morrissey’s connection to Chicano/a-Latino/a communities, the majority have simply reinscribed the fandom as an anomaly. Rather than attempt to “crack the code,” I read their participation as a part of a cultural landscape that makes the circulation of music available through various mediums including radio, shows, and house parties. Nevertheless, the level of adulation and respect Morrissey maintains within this

subculture is mirrored in Saldamando's affection toward the musical artist. Saldamando recalls begins asked by her activist parents, "“Why are you painting Morrissey? Why don't you paint Cesar Chavez?”" (Shatkin E12). Saldamando begins to answer this question in Morrissey's depiction at the helm of “The Holy *Cuatro*”— within her historical imaginary, his impact on her socio-cultural development makes him equally important as Chavez. And while images of Chavez (as expressed in Gaspar de Alba above) are ubiquitously found, Saldamando feels the need to draw Morrissey into her Japanese-Chicana experience.

Below the Morrissey *pañó*, Saldamando includes the image of Dave Gahan (lead singer of Depeche Mode) and Siouxsie Sioux (front woman of Siouxsie and the Banshees). Located to the viewer's left in green ink, Gahan looks straightforward as if to stare back at the viewer. Of the four images included in “The Holy *Cuatro*,” Gahan's is the most approachable of the subjects. Gahan's awareness of the public eye is met with sincerity unlike Morrissey's seemingly unamused glance. Like his contemporaries, Depeche Mode writes of desire, acceptance, and trust that when performed by Gahan make him vulnerable and relatable. And it is this vulnerability that momentarily reverses the gaze and connects the viewer to the artwork.

Where Gahan converses with the audience, Siouxsie Sioux appears in her own thoughts as she peers up and back toward the Morrissey piece. Sioux's role within Saldamando's installation is similar to her position within the British 1980s post-punk scene as a figure of difference and disruption to a predominantly male musical landscape. Highlighting “the problems facing a woman seeking to enter the rock world as participant,” Angela McRobbie notes, “a girl is supposed to be an individual listener, she is not encouraged to develop the skills and knowledge to become performer...” (143). A fixture at Sex Pistols' concerts, Sioux was an eccentric figure (like Alice Bag) who challenged norms aesthetically through dress, make-up,

and hair. Sioux's "style of presentation was stiff and angular, her posture often at odds with her attire. With her heavy makeup, Sioux... strove to be more sexually repulsive than attractive" (Leblanc 46). Where the other three musicians look to the audience in varying degrees, Sioux is present but not interested in engaging. Saldamando reinforces this by drawing Sioux's left hand raised in a slight fist—once again, the only one of the four to include this difference.

The last figure in "The Holy *Cuatro*" is lead singer of the Cure, Robert Smith. Smith looks up at the viewer with a piercing gaze that is veiled behind strands of hair. With his head bent forward accentuating his teased and unruly hairstyle, Smith plays into the somber and alienated persona that represents the music of the Cure. Smith's image is much more effeminate as the red ink used in the art piece heavily underscores his lower lash line and lips. Thus, Robert Smith mirrors personal friend and sometimes band mate, Siouxsie Sioux in looks and demeanor. Furthermore, by positioning him directly below Morrissey, Saldamando subtly depicts a decades long antagonistic relationship between the two musicians. Shizu Saldamando's inclusion of this understated reference is yet another way in which the piece is made intimate and accessible to those who know versus a larger mainstream public.

Together—Morrissey, Dave Gahan, Siouxsie Sioux, and Robert Smith—signify the difference in cultural affiliations for Saldamando and her Chicana-Latina subjects. By exhibiting difference, the Chicana-Latina youth Saldamando portrays establish sites of possibility through a negation of pre-ascribed ways of being. There is an agency that occurs when the women are able to recognize one another, and create space both within and beyond strictly Chicana/o-Latina/o communities. "To be recognized by my negating activity is to be valued for my power to 'make' a difference rather than reflect it; it is to be accepted for my contradictory, contentious collaboration rather than my collusive, predictable presence" (Bhabha 22). The difference that

the women make should not strictly be interpreted as intentional resistance but instead occurs at the moment at which the women are read as transgressing boundaries. Therefore, in being recognized for choosing not to participate in traditional gender roles the women introduce “a species of anti-identity politics that, although clearly linked to [Latino culture]... also runs beyond identity and culture as defined by categories of race and ethnicity” (Viego 143). That is not to argue that identity does not matter, but rather that there is a need to take seriously contradictory feelings, ideas, and performances that broaden notions of *Latinidad*. Culture moves in multidirectional ways, thus the British figures that travel into Chicana cultural representations are not anomalies but expressions of this exchange.

Teen Angels

Working through the everyday performative aspect of identity, Saldamando states, “I find it fascinating how people spend a lot of time on [their look]... I’m interested in people and what makes one’s self” (Wong). Questioning and disrupting identity is at the heart of Saldamando’s work. Saldamando is drawn to those who aesthetically play with identity in their everyday lives. It is a hyper-performance that is not only seen among cholos, punks, and new wavers but inter-culturally as well. For example the berating looks Alice Bag feels as she walks up to the MEChA table in high school is a rejection based on appearance and “not looking like” a familiar and easily categorized subject. Founding member of 1960s art collective Asco, Harry Gamboa Jr. writes, “For Asco, what made Chicano identity *performative* was not that it named itself against all odds, as an act of defiance, but that it was constituted within a set of social relations largely defined by the mass media and the corporate liberal state” (Gamboa 11). In his critique, Gamboa alludes to the dangers of narrowly defining identity as it too becomes subject to perform the

needs of the state. Thus like Asco, Alice Bag and Shizu Saldamando create productive tension as the scream, twist, and dance to culturally unfamiliar tunes.

One of these transgressive moments is performed in Shizu Saldamando's "Sandy and Siouxsie" (2007). Created with colored pencils and glitter, "Sandy and Siouxsie" presents a fairly young woman, waist up, standing to her right, left hand holding a lit cigarette. Aesthetically, she is dressed in a well-worn shoulder cut t-shirt depicting the late-1970s U.K. goth band, Bauhaus. The subject's make-up is light; yet, there is a particular care and emphasis on her eyes—sharp dark eyebrows, heavy black eyeliner and mascara (a la Siouxsie Sioux) with hints of red around the eyelids—and bright red lipstick. The subject's hair is a bit disheveled with the front of it swept to the right side showing just a glimmer of red dyed-hair, and on her right arm a tattoo of Siouxsie Sioux surrounded by black and red stars.

Upon first encountering the image, one is struck by the use of the use of color in relation to the overwhelming use of white space—a standard in Saldamando's work.⁴ Yet, what makes the negative space so profound is the use of black with hints of red that add emphasis to otherwise minor details. Sandy's body is outlined by the color black in hair, t-shirt, tattoo, and nail color. The visual effect brings the viewers attention inward to provide a sense of intimacy and familiarity. While Sandy looks off into the distance, the spectator cannot help but look in the same direction and is only brought back by the cigarette smoke that trails off into white space. Interestingly, unlike Sioux's earlier depiction, it is she not Sandy that is staring back at the viewer. If as Saldamando posed above, Sioux is one of four holy figures for this group of Chicana/o-Latina/os, then like the ubiquitous Virgin of Guadalupe tattoos Sioux watches over Sandy.

⁴ With very few exceptions, Shizu Saldamando is known for her use of white space in framing the subjects.



[Figure 7. Shizu Saldamando “Sandy and Siouxsie” (2007). Photo by Shizu Saldamando]

As in most of her work, the title of Saldamando’s piece helps enhance the intimate relationship between the British new wave and Latina/o youth. Entitled “Sandy and Siouxsie,” the two figures are divorced of their associations to a larger public belonging—Sandy has no last name and is thus set-apart from a (usually) patriarchal lineage just as Siouxsie is removed from her male counterparts, the “Banshees.” In this context, united through “and,” Sandy *and* Siouxsie produce an image of friendship and kinship. It is a togetherness made real through the image of Siouxsie Sioux engraved in Sandy’s arm. Furthermore, this sonic community that travels across time and geography is reiterated in the well worn, tattered t-shirt Sandy wears. It is a t-shirt that

has been heavily worn as an expression of her devotion to Bauhaus, a souvenir of a past show, recovered or handed down. By wearing the British sound in t-shirt and tattoo, Sandy lays claim to a musical movement and community. Sandy's cool and ambivalent demeanor can be read as a metaphor of her position within mainstream Chicana/o-Latina/o and U.S. culture—a present absence that still manages to reverberate within the social imaginary.

Because Shizu Saldamando's art is based on photographs she takes of her friends at social functions, she is able to capture somewhat unfiltered images of her subjects. The spectator's gaze that usually accompanies traditional forms of portraiture where the sitter knows they will be on display does not weigh as heavily on Saldamando's artwork. The result is a series of pictures where the female subjects seem largely unaware of or uninterested in performing for the camera. They are instead in deep conversation with friends, drinking at a bar, or dancing in a nightclub. It is the former scene that sets the stage for "Carm in the Club Line" (2007). Executed with color pencils, "Carm in the Club Line" maintains the use of dark colors, yet refrains from the incorporation of contrasting bright colors that was seen in the previous artwork. In this image, a woman is standing upright, head looking over to the left, one hand in her pocket, the other on/near her hip. With medium length dark hair parted in the middle and no real sign of make-up, the piece presents a contrast to "Sandy and Siouxsie." Carm is wearing a t-shirt with the cover art to Depeche Mode's 1986 single "A Question of Lust," necklace, black hooded sweatshirt, jeans, and studded belt.



[Figure 8. Shizu Saldamando “Carm in the Club Line” (2007). Photo by Shizu Saldamando]

Where Sandy overtly embodied the British post-punk scene, Carm is much more reserved in her affiliations. “Carm in the Club Line” feels stripped down and casual in the lack of glitter and bright color that marked the previous art piece. This laid-back feeling is embodied in Carm’s simple presentation. There are no major defining features that make her stand out and yet as a spectator you cannot look away. Carm stands stiff and somewhat clumsily with both hands in pocket. Yet, even in its awkwardness, the drawing exudes a warm timid energy that is further established in her slight inward curve to the shoulders. It is a body language that seems at odds with the title as Carm seems far away from a club. And like Sandy, she very well may be like her attention—elsewhere.

Physically, Carm is set farther away from the frame and behind a fence thus creating even more of a distance from the viewer. Saldamando choose to include the fence and camera into the

landscape that is otherwise left blank and simultaneously creates a feeling of inclusion and exclusion. Hence, distance and proximity are another important aspect of this image. While there is a distance between the spectator and Carm, the viewer is also on the same side of the fence, standing with Saldamando and friend. In this manner Saldamando creates a collective that counters or complicates the initial sense of remoteness in this piece. In the group like setting, Carm, Saldamando, the viewer, and the person holding the camera are in the same place, at the same moment. The fleeting moment is captured and reproduced through the drawing that is fixed, long lasting and like Saldamando imagined it. In Saldamando's decision to include the camera holding hands, (like Carm, Sandy, and Siouxsie) they show disinterest in the viewer or the act of gazing. The hands hold the camera as if also ready to document this moment. However, the camera is facing the out of frame subject. Thus documenting their own moment and through self-involvement disrupt the focus on Carm. Accented with glitter, the camera is a reminder of the world that is happening beyond the frame—that which is omitted and replaced by negative space in Saldamando's piece.

The various narratives present in "Carm in the Club" are a reminder, as in Chapter 2, that it is often what is not there or its traces that help relay a story. Carm's proximity and disassociation is up against an intimate encounter and leisurely activity with friends. It is this ongoing negotiation of meaning and possibility that reflect Carm's (Sandy's, Shizu's, and Alice's) development as subject-in-process. "The term 'subject-in-process' [as used by Norma Alarcón] does not insinuate a progressional, unidirectional development; instead the process is often spastic, unpredictable, continually unfolding without origin or end, an act of becoming that never ceases" (Rodriguez *Queer Latinidad* 7). In this manner, the piece's title "Carm in the Club Line" also suggests a type of waiting and moving toward the club that takes its time. After all, in

the club line, Carm is in the company of friends whose shared cultural affinity makes the waiting all the more enjoyable.

Holy *Mole*

In his essay “‘Chico, What Does It Feel Like to be a Problem’,” José Esteban Muñoz describes José Feliciano’s 1968 rendition of the National Anthem as an example of

A “Brown utterance” that represented a still nascent articulation of a particular mode of belonging-in-difference or particularly for people who felt Brown—for people who knew their self and recognized each other through a particular negation, a negation that is enacted by failing to conform to the affective protocols of normative cultural citizenship. (449)

As I read the description of ‘Brown’ utterance, it is hard not to imagine Alice Bag clutching her microphone and screaming: “She’s taken too much of the domesticated world, she’s tearing it to pieces, she’s a violence girl!” The opening line of “Violence Girl” confronts expected ways of being that Bag is no longer willing to participate in. You can feel the tension and resistance to tradition as Bag physically gives into the adrenaline that fills the music. In her “*mero mole*,” Bag’s body thrashes across the stage with arms and legs flailing into the audience.⁵ Her expression is serious as she spit the words: “She’s a violence girl, she thrives on pain, she’s a violence girl, you can’t restrain!” The regulated violence of the domesticated world is what creates and sustains the figure. Unrestrained, Violence Girl’s anger is palpable as it circulates among bodies and sticks to those who recognize themselves in the lyrics.

⁵ A popular expression originating in Mexico D.F., “*mero mole*” means to be in one’s element.

Alice Bag's "Brown" utterance—her "Brown" sound—is not relegated to a venue but instead travels to create remote communities of difference. It is this familiar feeling that Shizu Saldamando and her peers recognize as they too negate "normative cultural citizenship" in their everyday turn to the Atlantic.⁶ In this feeling of kinship, what I have referred to as a lineage of *locas*," Saldamando and Bag cause trouble. It is a network of troublemakers that include the women analyzed throughout this dissertation—the cracks in the sidewalk that Marisela Norte makes, Tomato Rodriguez's F.L.A.M. biker jacket, and Michele Serros consumption of a Rooty Tooty Fresh 'N Fruity breakfast. And is also seen in figures that did not make it into this iteration of the chapter, including crusty punk Cristy C. Road and Laureana Toledo's cover band that only plays songs from Sheffield, England. These *Locas* do not hope for happy resolution but instead revel in "feeling like a problem." Through negation the women actively conceive of new ways of belonging in the world. The role that affirmation and recognition play in the establishment of these sites is especially important to those already involved in these cultural movements, as well as newcomers who may not see representation of themselves within larger mainstream racial and ethnic depictions. Furthermore, such a position while redefining the contours of *Latinidad* also point toward a larger necessity to speak, write, acknowledge, and interrogate the fluid and transnational nature of cultural and national citizenship. As seen throughout the dissertation, Latinas adopt various modes of travel and mobility to refute spatial and temporal fixity in order to forge cross-cultural transits at local and transnational levels.

⁶ Alice Bag and Shizu Saldamando collaborated on a project in December 2014. Bag recorded a song with Los Angeles based queer DJ and *Maricón* Collective member Martin Sorrondeguy. To commemorate the video premier of single "THE SHHH," Saldamando created a *pañito* piece that depicts Bag and Sorrondeguy.

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